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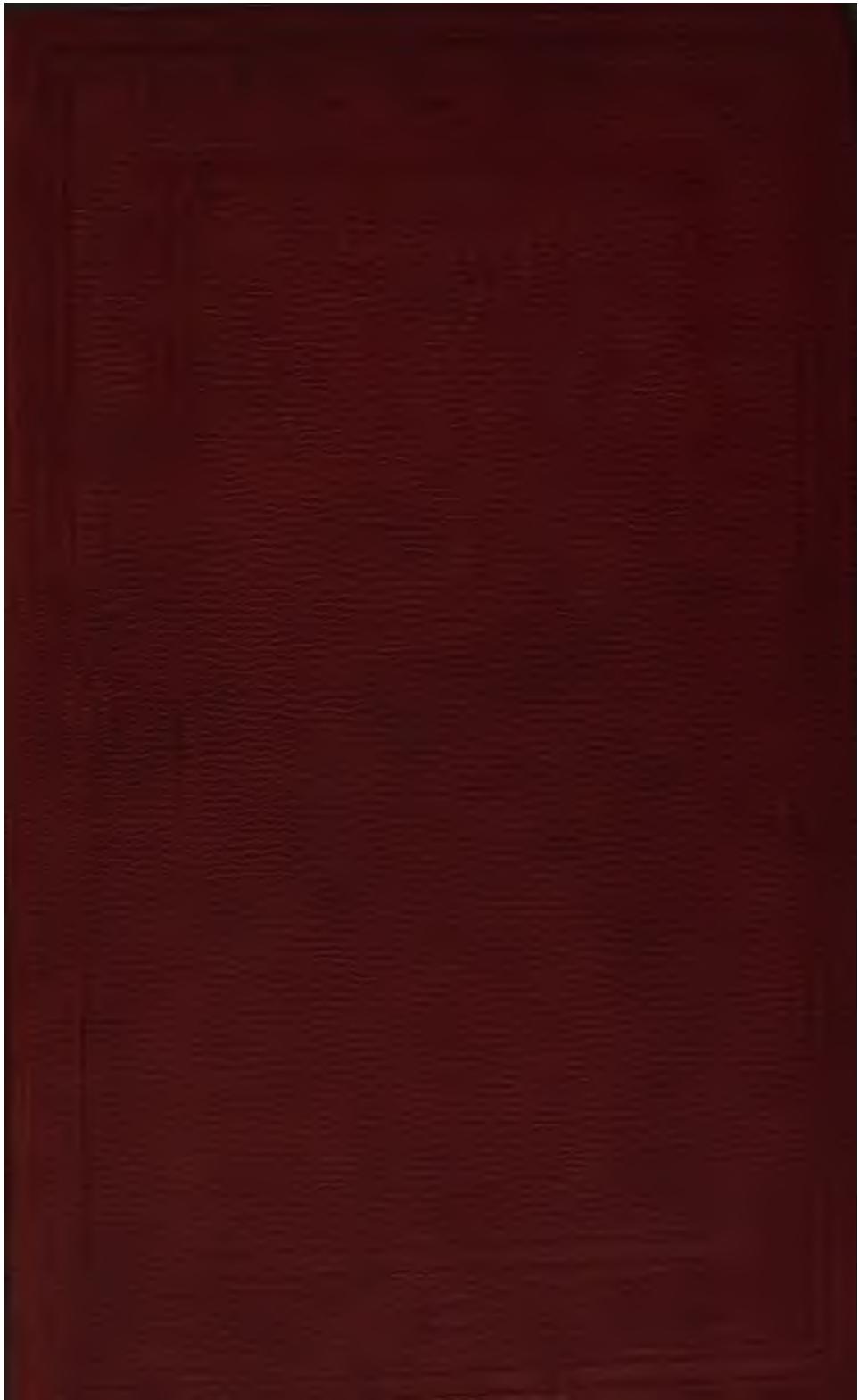
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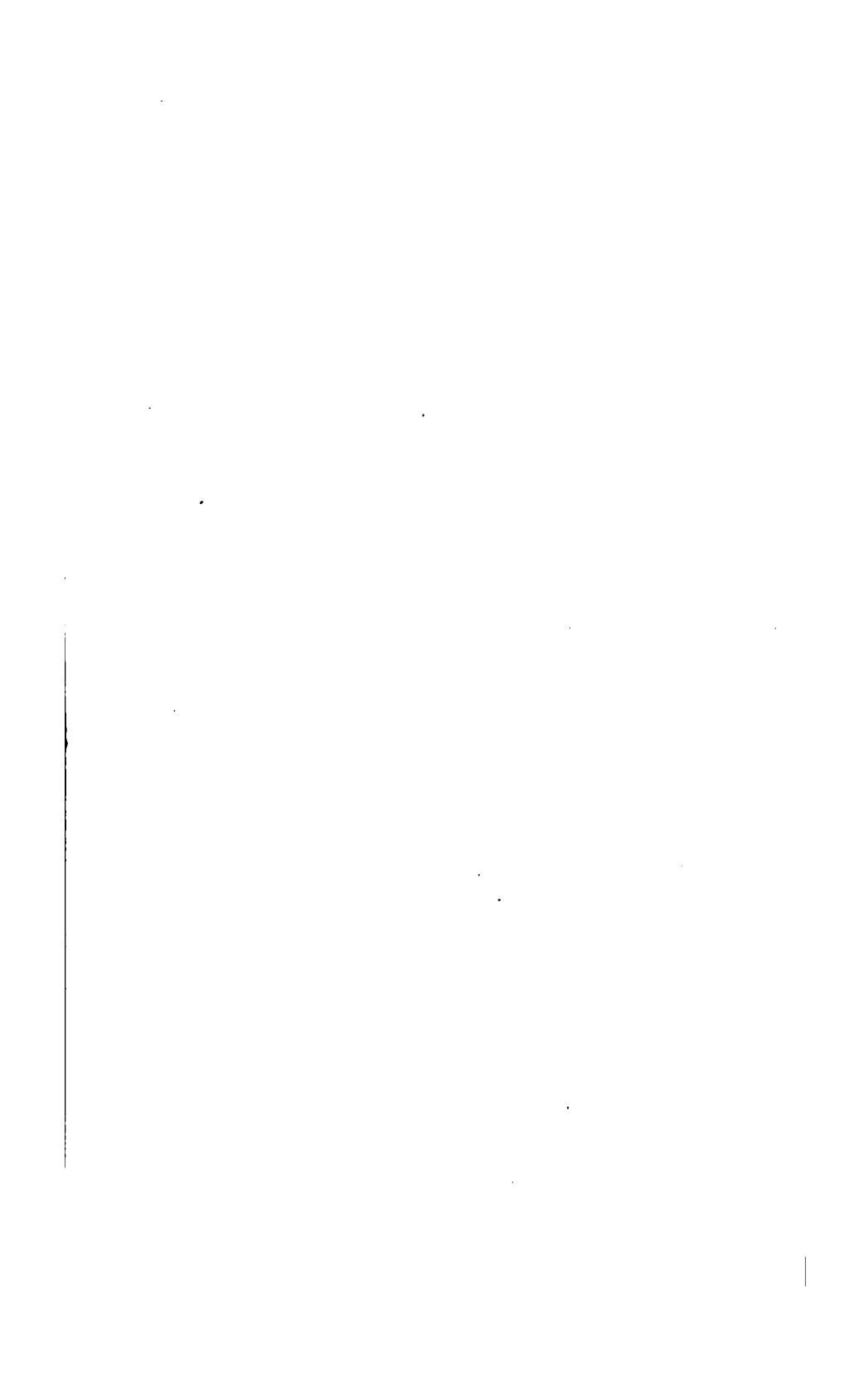
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MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS.



MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'THE NUT-BROWN MAIDS.'

'My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here,
My heart's in the Highlands a-chasing the deer;
Chasing the wild deer, and following the roe,
My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go.'

BURNS.

'Were it not for the French and the caterpillars we should be quite happy ;
but the former disturb our peace and the latter our gooseberries.'

ANNE GRANT OF LAGGAN.

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THE Author is indebted to a song and a picture for the name of the book, and to Anne Grant of Laggan's Letters and the great Doctor's famous 'Tour' for contemporary casts of character, modes, and customs.



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MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS.

CHAPTER I.

SUNSHINE AND SHADE.

MN her little hat and tartan habit—for those were the days when ladies perversely walked in habits, and many a fair town bride was churched in a riding-dress who never mounted steed either in her married or maiden days—in her habit, with the long, inconvenient skirt tucked smartly over her arm, and carrying a bag rather notable and useful than ornamental, but with a handful of wild flowers, particularly the rich yellow lady's bedstraw, because she loved cheerful flowers—Mary Macdonnel walked up Glen Aldour.

Glen Aldour, with its *towns* and *parks*, was on a small scale, but it had many of the essentials of a Highland strath—a little loch, a tumbling river, a glen ‘opening back’ from the house of the laird, with tacksman’s houses and cottages, ‘where every man

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was a hunter, a fisher, and an architect in his own way, and there was a musician in every house, and a poet in every hamlet.' It answered the description of another glen, 'so narrow, so warm, so fertile, so overhung by mountains which seem to meet above you, with sides so shrubby and woody, the haunt of roes and numberless small birds.' Its patriarchal mansion stood alone, but its scattered dependents clustered round, and its braes, 'like lofty wa's,' closed the whole into one large family circle, and shut out the rest of the stranger world.

This was the bold nest of a sparrow-hawk, not the wild eyrie of an eagle. The loch was a lochan—a lovely blue basin ; the river was a burn ; and many of the heather hills might well have been climbed 'without a sob' by Malcolm Græme, since Mary had ascended them again and again every summer within her recollection. But then Mary was a hardy mountain maiden, as active as most boys, and there was one towering summit—the shoulder of the pass, the Ben Falloch of the neighbourhood—which Mary only secretly sighed to attempt, but had never yet accomplished. The patriarchal mansion was no more than a tall, narrow white house, with small, irregular windows, steep roof, odd turrets projecting from the gable, and a honeysuckle porch, which the flowery good or bad taste of some gentle domestic laird had substituted for the strong, stone-arched doorway ; and the ancient grey tower, nearer the loch, existed only in such crumbling masses that its half-levelled walls were a favourite

resort of ambitious cattle, who did not even risk life or limb on its rounded eminences.

Yet the narrow bounds of the glen by no means shook the fidelity of Highland attachment or the steadfastness of clanmanship; probably it rather intensified them. Mary Aldour, who had been as far as the town of Inverluig, reckoned no place in the world, not the vale of Tempe, to be compared to Glen Aldour, and considered every soul within its marches her blood-relation, only more or less removed, and, says the Highland proverb, ‘All the waters of the sea could not wash out your blood from mine.’ There was merit as well as bigotry in this notion. The modern theory—Feed the poor if he be distant from you, but disown all who approach too near your worship, or have any special claim on your notice and regard—a circumstance which might render your charity a little less conspicuous, and might interfere with a few of your loud pretensions—is not quite so Christian as we are apt to suppose.

Mary Aldour was Highland to the heart’s core—a true representative of her glen, yet the Highland woman of a particular class and era; not the Highland woman of the Rebellion—that was well over, only houses in ruins, wasted territories held by connivance for absent families, and the stories of the old, lingered as its traces; not the daughter of a great northern noble or chief, with far more state and sway to that day than an English peer. A good Protestant, though a Church of England woman, was Mary,

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the sensible, independent daughter of a laird of long descent, but moderate acres even of heather, powerful more from precedent and personal popularity than from fortune. But here ends any classification of Mary with a commonplace modern young lady.

Mary Macdonnel of Aldour belonged to Aldour, with its dozen women servants, its gillies, or 'youths of the girdle' without number; its paucity of chariots, represented only by the canvas car ; and its multiplicity of horses and dogs—its plough horses, cart horses, riding horses, trusty shelties, rough unshod colts and fillies roaming over the moors, and its stag-hounds, otter-hounds, terriers, and collies ; its seventy cows with their complement of calves ; its sheep and goats by thousands ; the temporary swarms from the parent hive of its domestic economy in the shape of summer shealings, bothies, milking stations, hay grounds, with every article of foreign origin—that is, what was not sown, and grown, and ground, and brewed, and baked, and tanned, and moulded, and spun, and woven in Aldour—to be drawn in stores from Inverluig by quarterly instalments, and if the stock ran short and the stormy weather set in, no sugar or tea, or brandy, or silk, or cloth, or lace to be had for love or money till the sky cleared, and Mary Aldour rode, and baited, and boated for a long day with Dugald Roy or Callum More, and brought them home at night behind her saddle and his.

Mary led a life peculiar to the time and country, not only the Scotch country and the Highland

country, but the individual ‘country’ to which her branch of the great clan Macdonnel belonged—the little glen, of which she too would have exclaimed, in her magniloquent simplicity and ardour, ‘How populous, how vital is the strath !’

Possibly, had Mary lived in the present day she would have broken the hearts of scores of low-country sportsmen, not because her beauty was marvellous, or her virtue transcendent, but because she was so thoroughly Highland, that she must have been fresh as the heather, and racy and pungent as the pine-woods and the peat smoke. However, when Mary lived, no shoals of Saxons flocked northwards; all men of means, or aspirations to means, did not shoulder guns and fishing-rods, they rather hankered after flageolets and haunted mineral waters. The North to the southern had still much of the horror with which it appalled the unhappy Hessians; they took Dr. Johnson’s word for it, and imagined it a savage and barren country which caused the great scholar rather to shudder with aversion than hold up his hands with delight. And if any poor finical, quaking, or grumbling fine gentleman had crossed Mary’s path, it is to be feared she too would have been quite ready to have turned up her nose at him and dubbed him ‘Smelfungus.’

Mary had less of her father than her mother in her. For Aldour, you may see his outward man in the graphic sketch, ‘He was now sixty-two years of age, hale and well-proportioned, with a manly

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countenance tanned by the weather, yet having a ruddiness in his cheeks, over a great part of which his rough beard extended. His eye was quick and lively, yet his look was not fierce, but he appeared at once firm and good-humoured. He wore a pair of brogues—tartan hose, which came up only near to his knees and left them bare; a purple camlet kilt; a black waistcoat; a short green cloth coat, bound with gold cord; a yellowish bushy wig; a large blue bonnet with a gold thread button.' In mind he was a frank, manly, simple fellow, simple in his greatest strength, simple in his greatest weakness and worst deceit—brought up, like King George, to be king in Aldour, and not so wise and prudent as royal George in his safe domesticity and sober dreams. He had uttered too often the dear old, clumsy, shy, but most cordial Scottish phrase, 'As you have found your way once here, you must see that you find your way back again.' Open-handed, like most of the old Highland lairds, as long as a head of cattle or tree top lasted; entertaining gentle and simple who came by Aldour, and travelled by the glen for the express purpose of benefiting by the Laird's hospitality at his own free charges; enlivening his years by great brimming, not over-wise or over-beneficial, feasts at every rural epoch — sheep-shearing, corn-cutting, potato-digging, flax-scutching, wool-teasing, and seed-sowing—besides his full 'fifteen' clansmen and their 'tails' to share his Christmas, and protract their festivities through the first month of the new year.

Mrs. Macdonnel was a woman of another stamp—a big woman every way, what was called in those days ‘a strapper,’ a figure in large mould, almost rising to a level with her husband’s, a face, the regularity of whose strongly marked features was only spoilt by the over-width of the mouth, a common national fault—a woman of keener intellect, and quicker, not softer feelings, and far superior energies to Aldour’s—and she had been won to wed him by this very superiority. Unmarried, she was not held the most amiable daughter among the spinsters in her father’s house ; a single woman, she would have proved one of those shrewd, humorous, snappish ‘ladies with their lasses,’ curious personages, moving, or rather standing still in the population of old Scotland—delightful to know by report—awful to encounter face to face, yet invaluable for their truth and fidelity to their nature, their nurture, and their principles. But Providence was kind to Mrs. Macdonnel ; when she was still young, gay, and handsome, Aldour, then somewhat sheepish as well as transparent in his candour, though well up in years, fell in her way, became enamoured of a fair lady, not very like his heavy, hearty self, and, fortunately for his suit, being at the time somewhat of a cat’s paw and butt of sharper and younger people, went in, prospered in his wooing, won his prize, and afforded his spouse an open space for her talents, and a wide field for her affections.

Mrs. Macdonnel’s peculiarity was a great tenderness for the weak, and an active inclination to set

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wrong right. This was a noble temper to deal with the helpless and infirm, and Mrs. Macdonnel was always a favourite with the very young, who hung about her skirts, and the very old who leant upon her arm—and an excellent spirit it was to challenge injury and defend and rescue the oppressed. But where there was equality and no particular malice, or malice of a very mixed and puzzling character, Mrs. Macdonnel, while still a high-spirited young lady, grew restless from the rusting of her faculties, or acquired the unenviable reputation of officiousness, self-conceit, and desire after empire. Once she became Mrs. Macdonnel, once she had genial Aldour and a large household and a glen full of retainers and a succession of little children to manage, protect, and patronize, and her powers were mellowed by experience and moderated by indulgence, she was universally recognised as a most worthy woman, and pattern matron—and treasure to Aldour.

Mrs. Macdonnel's later years, except when Mary was from home, were given largely to her younger children. Mary had ceased to need her mother incessantly—that greatest claim to her attention—and though she was proud of Mary and of the young Laird at college, and of Malcolm at the parish school, and under the more scholarly training of a retired gentleman, Mr. Cormac Macgregor, and of the two half-grown girls, Flora and Catherine, filling Mary's old place, acquiring accomplishments at Inverluig—although she held them all in strong regard, she was fonder of her little

ones, whom, in spite of her wholesome firmness and kindness, it was the will of God should be weak and defective in bodily organs and functions. What a pang it was to the strong, capable woman to find a son a cripple, and a daughter sickly wellnigh to death, only she could tell ; but what springs of love and devotion the untoward circumstances called forth in her, what magnanimity and unselfishness and tenderness it developed in the silent, reticent woman, men and angels might have paused to see.

Mary resembled her mother in her instincts ; grew hot at an injustice, struck in for a whipped dog and a starved horse and an afflicted fellow-creature in considerable defiance of calm decorum and suave serenity ; remained steadfast to her friends for the very reason which rendered other people negligent of theirs—because they were failing or ailing, or could render her no benefit, or tried her patience and benevolence. Some people call this pride, but we have heard of a lesson of high authority which enjoins us to give, expecting nothing again, and bids us invite to our feasts those who can render us no return. We must confess that Mary also had some of the elements of those eccentric, determined old maids about her ; but Mary was still at a pleasant age, and her crotchets were tempered by a better education than her mother and her aunts had received, and she had enjoyed early advantages and comparative freedom and action as the eldest daughter of an easy, affable, and, according to prevailing notions,

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public-spirited father, and of a mother cumbered with so many and such imperative cares, that even her great resources were drained—and thus on Mary devolved much of the rule and business of the crowded busy house and its glen.

Mary was in the habit—not of complaining exactly, but of regretting this serious responsibility as interfering with her studies and impairing her opportunity of culture ; she was unconscious how much health, ease, and content, greater mildness of manner and gentleness of temper, she owed to constant general occupation and sustained universal industry. A girl like Mary would not have been improved by mental concentration, and by a single engrossing pursuit.

Mary's education was concluded at Inverluig, where there were two churches, a bank, shops, and a stationary regiment, and in winter weekly assemblies —by all of which Mary was supposed to profit ; and whether in its beginning or ending it was a very excellent education, although it did not match Miss Maclean's, whom the great Doctor found the most accomplished lady in the Highlands. ‘She knows French, music, and drawing, sews neatly, makes shell work, and can milk cows—in short, she can do everything ; she talks sensibly, and is the first person I have found that can translate Erse poetry literally.’ Perhaps Mary could have rivalled her in the last particulars, but she failed in the ‘tinkling and daubing,’ and no great loss when the usual performance on the harpsichord did not exceed that of poor Bet

Flints. ‘She put herself into fine attitudes and drummed.’ Mary’s aims were ‘geography and dancing, and a taste for the standard literature of the time, superadded to her early powers of reading, writing, and summing;’ and, scarcely subservient to this course, the laborious execution of an immense amount of fine needlework, and the careful formation of several youthful friendships with members of her own sex, singularly influential and permanent.

Is any one pedantic enough to smile at this list? Dear, dear! what women these plain solid attainments made: see them in Mrs. Grant of Laggan, Mrs. Rose of Kilravock, Sir Walter Scott’s mother, Elizabeth Hamilton, and Lady Nairne.

Mary Aldour had a strong imagination, and its food, after the inspiration of the Bible, consisted of Ossian, then universally admired (the poor Edinburgh painter was spending his strength and flinging away his life, sprawling on his back in a fevered effort to complete that grotesque Sistine chapel, Clerk of Penicuik’s Ossian’s Hall, and less ambitious Ossian’s halls, faint remnants of the enthusiasm, greet us still in tiny moss-houses commanding slender linns), Pope’s Homer’s ‘Iliad’ and ‘Odyssey,’ Swift’s ‘Gulliver,’ a tolerable stock of biography, principally of kings and generals, with the ‘Vicar of Wakefield’ and the ‘Fool of Quality,’ for a light, simple domestic dessert.

Grant that this ancient, extravagant, or primitive diet produced extravagant or primitive fruits. Young

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ladies, when dismal, were inclined to describe the evening, ‘Grey night grows dim along the plain, I saw a deer at Crona’s stream ; a mossy bank he seemed through the gloom, but soon he bounded away. A meteor played round his branchy horns, and the awful faces of other times looked down from the clouds of Crona.’ Or, ‘The winds came down on the woods. The torrents rushed from the rocks. Rain gathered round the head of Cromla ; and the red stars trembled between the flying clouds.’ They dreamt of chiefs ‘in the pride of their former deeds’ of whom the bard had sung, ‘Their souls are kindled at the battles of old and the actions of other times. Their eyes are like flames of fire, and roll in search of the foes of the land. Their mighty hands are on their swords. And lightning pours from their sides of steel. They come like streams from the mountain ; each rushes roaring from his hill. Bright are the chiefs of battle, in the armour of their fathers. Gloomy and dark, their heroes follow like the gathering of the rainy clouds behind the red meteors of heaven. The sounds of crashing arms ascend. The grey dogs howl between. Unequally bursts the song of battle, and rocking Cromla echoes round. On Lina’s dusky heath they stand like mist that shades the hills of autumn ; when broken and dark it settles high, and lifts its head to heaven.’

These girls compared this thicket of alders and hazel by the side of a lochan to ‘the creek where Ulysses went on shore in Phæacia ;’ and that little

thatched inn, with its apparatus for shooting and fishing suspended from the roof, to a hero's home 'in Ithaca.' They wished in their teens for 'an asylum from the levity and dissipation of the age ;' they wept abundantly and believed their hearts broken at girlish partings ; they were affected and absurd. But, on the other hand, in their own cases, none distinguished more clearly between the real and the imaginary ; they mixed shrewd penetration and lively humour with their wildest flights, while they propagated sensible, philosophic, peaceful, pious precepts, (compare Fanny Burney's earlier letters with Fanny Burney's later novels.) And how refreshing it is to find them rising at five o'clock in the morning to have their prayers, their 'little dress, little Odyssey, and little breakfast,' and yet not interfere with the rest of their duties ; to hear of Mary Macdonnel having her book stitched full of the letters of her dear correspondents whom she might never see again after they had been school girls together till their heads were grey and their hearts heavy ; not 'mighty genteel letters on glossy paper,' not with 'beastly commercial flourishes,' but hearty, sagacious effusions, to be perused with amusement and profit by the hearth on many a stormy, snowy day in the glen. What correspondents such a consciousness of the estimation in which they were held, and the duration of their reign produced ! Indeed, indeed, this was more valuable intercourse than that of mere vanity, idleness, and scandal.

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Yes, Mary Aldour was a fine, promising creature, whether or not her summer fulfilled the hopes of her spring. The result was pending, whether the bloom of her mind and heart would fade and fall away, or whether it would ripen into autumn fruit. Whether her disposition would wax hard and coarse, or whether grace would be given it to soften and sweeten its harshness into the full nature of a virtuous woman—a woman that feared the Lord, a daughter that excelled them all.

Mary's person was very prepossessing and rather peculiar, but, remember, by no means faultless. She was not so big or stately as some even of her young countrywomen, but she had the elegance of Flora Macdonald, who had spent but a winter on the mainland of Inverness-shire—the elegance of a fine figure, slender, but firm as one of her birch-trees, of great health of body and mind—self-reliant, enduring, elastic—each limb and muscle, faculty and trait, with their notable and unapproachable ease and activity, without restlessness or rashness. She had the flaxen hair and rose-blush complexion which in many girls create an effect insipid as whey, phlegmatic as the general countenance of a doll. But there was fire in Mary's deep blue eyes with their clear brown brows and lashes, play in her irregular features tinted so brightly, and sense and acumen in her full forehead. No one ever imagined a doll like Mary—not even a Frankenstein could have supplied it with so much living soul; no one regretted the 'lint white locks' drawn off the fore-

head, and fixed in long pyramids composed of piles of curls combed and linked up together (that was the era of high heads, when the Miss Cumberlands were hissed out of the theatre on account of the length of their erect feathers, according to Mrs. Thrale), erected on Mary's top, somewhat flattened by her hat—no one wanted them black as night to lend additional force and vigour to the intellectual, tolerably determined physiognomy, any more than they would have proposed the white throat, round which so near an approach to a man's neckerchief was knotted accurately, to be tanned brown, in order to rob it of its tame fairness and softness.

Mary walked up Glen Aldour with a springy step. It was one of the mornings when she was very glad that she was at home again, in spite of the youthful Clarissa Harlowe and Harriet Byron friendships, and she knew that many people were equally glad, and that she was particularly wanted in a score of places. Mary was in the greater request, that her eldest brother was at present at college in Aberdeen ; young Aldour, though younger than Mary, was of course a person of first-rate consequence in the glen. Then her sisters next in age, Flora and Catherine, were also at school, and there were no individuals of the family to divide her charge but the twelve year old lad Malcolm, lame Niel, and sickly Annie.

Thus Mary endured the whole plague of popularity, and she maintained very frequently that it worried and distracted her, and that when she only felt a rational, friendly Macdonnel feeling to all the families

in the glen, it was trying to find numbers of them depending upon her and expecting a great deal from her. Why ! it frittered away her heart and exhausted her mind, but Mary's supplies rose to the demand, and she was scarcely ever known to disappoint an applicant. There was she hurrying along, scarcely picking her way through the numerous little waters that leapt over the stones into the loch ; not avoiding the troublesome flies that hovered about its margin ; not fishing out a water-lily ; not examining the hills flecked with brown and green and in broad sunshine or shade, to see whether the sheep had mounted to such heights as indicated fine weather ; not even quoting Ossian as a cloud floated by ; but plodding on in the Sabbath-like stillness of the glen, quite busy and cheerful to Mary, telling off in her mind a list of persons whom she was to visit before she returned to the house to dinner.

Mr. Cormac Macgregor, an ally of the Macdonnels, who had grown old in the great world without attaining anything but the reputation of a scholar and gentleman, and worn North again to close his eyes in Aldour—a fine polished gentleman who paid Mary French-founded compliments ; who would have cried 'Cruel to a fair female ! oh, fie ! fie ! fie ! pitiful, pitiful,' but who would not have hesitated to be fractious to that fair female when need required, and to reckon himself entitled to the freshest eggs of her hen Selma, and bannocks of the fair's baking, and the first specimen of her bramble jam.

The old ladies of the Cleugh, who were not at all courtly, but neither were they crabbed, yet they were so well satisfied when she examined the threads on their wheels, and tasted their cakes, and told them the last gossip of the loch, bothies, and House of Aldour.

Mrs. Macdonnel of the Schoolhouse, who was in her own estimation and in Mary's as much a lady as any of them, and who must never be slighted or forgotten because these Robertsons of Croclune, and even the Maclaughlans, Dunglas's factor's family—quite like their upstart, underbred ways—undervalued her : but Mrs. Macdonnel had too much good sense and good temper to do anything but laugh at them. Mary's moome amongst the shepherds' wives, the house where there were solemn preparations for the lykewake, the dwelling which rejoiced over the new-born baby, where orders for sheets and caudles and the luxury of white bread were looked for and welcomed.

As Mary passed along in her youth and usefulness and gladsome popularity, almost as much prized as Lady Margaret Macdonald before whom the wild clansmen ran to pick up the stones lest her horse should stumble, sunny and hardy as the sky above and the air around her, she crossed the opening into another glen and saluted a gentleman with a fishing-rod who came up its narrow horse track.

Glen Aldour was a flowery sylvan glen, with meadows by the loch, and the stream and its hills

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opening into sheltered recesses and fairy corries. Great wealth of creamy meadowsweet grew below, and above wild roses, bluebells, foxgloves in their seasons, and especially yellow flowers—gay as jonquil ribands—Lady's bedstraw a foot in flower, potentillas, an orange-tufted star, and a pale straw-coloured dragon-fly, with blue, lilac, and white milkwort, met the purple heather. The hills had possessed much natural wood where ‘Low down ’t was in the broom,’ and they still retained what they had originally owned of stripes of olive oak coppice, and plantations of silvery birks, stray mountain ashes, and old thorns, while the lairds had improved their opportunities of introducing birches and planes into their plantations. The detached fields, planted on terraces, were flourishing with creditable oats and bear—the very brown huts were burrowing together in sheltered nooks couthily and cozily, with poppling water and drooping branches, and free hills on every side of them. The whole formed a blooming glen in a bright day and a consoling pass to turn into in the white mist of a tempest.

Finralia, which crossed it, was as unlike in its character as the day of storm which succeeds the day of blue skies and zephyrs among the mountains. Finralia lay to the north, and was swept by the coldest winds, and had the earliest and latest snows. Finralia had been clothed with dark pinewood, cut as the exigencies of its masters demanded, with the bare, brown, rotting stumps, studded with speckled, poison-

ous fungi, left like the back woods in Canada the first season before the virgin soil is broken for grain—but no corn fields would ever cover the bleak hill sides of Finralia. The burn in Aldour now spread itself out in placid reaches of that clear brown water of the north country, now capered and caracoled over red and white gravel, and between fragments of mossy rock tufted with ferns, and great slabs of grey stone glittering with mica. The burn in Finralia sank into a compressed channel, whence it growled half hidden, or emerged only into eddying black pools, where the foam seethed as if it were settling over some hapless drowned wight who had but relaxed his death grapple and sunk like to its dark depths. There was no silver shield of a lochan in Finralia ; the house was higher and narrower than that of Aldour, and *built on* to a crumbling turret of the old castle, from which owls hooted nightly, and so far from a woodbine porch, its first rough dash of lime had never been repeated, so that it had long settled down into a grim grey with sombre weather-stains and patches of watery, green moss ; its offices were uncouth and tumble-down ; its few fields were miserably poor, and its *bhailies* ruinous. Above all, the glen had a bad name ; and give a glen, like a dog, a bad name and hang it, or clear it, for any good it is likely to do till it finds its reformer.

Spreaths or raids were over before Mary was born, but her father and mother remembered them well ; and the last ‘clouts’ that had been lifted, far or near,

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had been traced to Finralia. As Aldour belonged to a Macdonnel, Finralia was the property of a Fraser. While the Macdonnels had a high testimony and a high head in the district, the Frasers, from Lovat downwards, had an evil reputation and a hang-dog air. Of course they had given up their thefts, but they had not altogether amended their propensities. We have always our robber-chiefs among us, and they have only cast their sloughs and assumed new skins and transferred themselves largely to towns, and taken to plundering and pilfering professionally and commercially—at least, it was very much so with the Lairds of Finralia.

At the time of the rebellion, Aldour was saved from the destruction of the Macdonnels under young Glen-garry, by being an orphan of tender age, but Finralia was ‘out,’ and although he afterwards made peace with the Hanoverian authorities, he did so under an odium so black, that he had better have been shot like a dog at once, or skulked like a beast of prey, or languished in exile. Under the burden of his bad name he was declared to have compromised his principles and betrayed his cause, and it was always attested as evidence that, although the devil rewarded him with freedom and office, and a certain measure of rank and fortune, personally a curse clung to him. He married, late in life, a weak-minded, bitter-tempered heiress of the Country, with whom he lived in such strife and scandal, that had she not met her death plainly by an accident from the overturn of a car, which Finralia

was not driving, on one of the steep roads, half of the Country would have said and sworn that Finralia had wrung her neck, or flung her from one of the beetling windows of the old castle. They would have said it under their breaths though, for Finralia was not only Finralia, he was agent to Pitfadden, the largest landed proprietor in the Country, and he had farther demeaned himself to qualify himself as a lawyer in his middle age, in order to monopolize every crown office in Inverluig, where he spent the most of his years. His only son, Roderick, was wild ; the discords of his father's house, the company he saw there—the men who had fallen like his father—the dissolute, gambling officers, the fawning, crafty half pacers, were not likely to contribute to generosity of spirit or singleness of heart. His daughter Ussie was more deformed than Aldour's boy and girl, who had been struck by elfin arrows, or blighted by the baleful glances of the evil eye.

But this Finralia had gone at last to his account, and left his son to inherit the old tainted blood, the ban of the betrayed on the traitor and his race, the malice and grudge of his living neighbours, as well as the dear-bought offices and authority. Young Finralia took up his residence in the grey, battered house of Finralia. Some said he only took the trouble to ride several times a week into Inverluig to transact his business there that he might be farther removed from all law and order ; others declared, more charitably, that he meant to lead a more sober life, and for

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the sake of his sister Ussie, who was rarely seen by strangers, and whom the vulgar knew not whether to class as an infidel or a witch—they agreed in this, a terrible, vindictive sprite was Miss Ussie of Finralia.

Mary Aldour had met young Finralia a few times—a very few times—at the Robertsons of Croclune, who were not particular about the company they kept; after the chapel at Choillean, which some gentlemen were supposed to attend more as a token of loyalty to King George than to make their confessions and swear their vows to the King of Heaven; at the roup at Barvich; and the games at Auchnaglas. That Mary Aldour and Finralia should view each other far apart and with suspicion and aversion was certain, but so far did class connexion and formal propriety of manners prevail, that Mary and Finralia did not fail to greet each other at the heads of their respective glens—Mary, in the opening into honest, virtuous, green Aldour; Finralia displayed against the gloomy pinewood, or waste clearing of Finralia—Mary, with her fair complexion, which would not tan, and her lint-white locks, which yet looked as if they had been bleached by rough sun and wind into innocent flaxenness, as one sees the white crown of some sturdy independent boy; Finralia, in what was then considered the mature prime of his eight-and-twenty years, with the warm brown, that reminded one of a Gallic extraction, on brow and cheek, the half lounge, half slouch that concealed his proportions and spoilt the impression of the thews and sinews of his manli-

ness. Neither quite so picturesque in attire as they might have been fifty years before, or even fifty years afterwards, for the hoops were half out and the kilts had not been introduced afresh for gentlemen ; Mary in her long habit, Finralia in his trews and cambric frills ; but both of them comely enough to have warranted the appellation of nymph and swain in the mock-classic, mock-pastoral nomenclature of those days, but alack ! widely different in expression. Mary with the severe gravity that sat a little comically on her young face, and yet it was a just, good expression, even in its rigour ; Finralia with the palpable sneer borrowed from Lucifer. Well said Macaulay, that supercilious scorn is the most unmanly, the farthest removed from true humanity of all the contortions that can disfigure a face. Alas ! alas ! Finralia, who would have guessed how tenderly you had lifted Ussie from her bed to her chair that morning, how magnanimously you had forgiven the lying dog-boy ! So they looked, passed, and parted, believing in their two stubborn hearts that their paths in life lay as far apart as light from darkness.





CHAPTER II.

THE GATHERING AFTER THE CHAPEL AT CHOILLEAN.

HE little homely English chapel of Choillean was reared on consecrated ground, in a hollow of weeping birches, where an old religious house had once challenged the devotion of the rugged north country, several miles from Inverluig; and in the chapel at stated intervals a clergyman in orders officiated for the benefit of the scattered population belonging to the Episcopal Church in the glens and straths around. Between these services the bigoted, or the careless and cold abstained from public worship altogether; but conscientious, pious, humble-minded, liberal-tempered people, like Mary Aldour, in the main attended the parish kirk, where the good priests were, in a measure, hereditary, often retaining their several livings in individual families for ‘four generations,’ and where they were frequently connexions as well as familiar friends of the surrounding lairds, who swallowed the long Presbyterian sermon the more readily that it was delivered in Gaelic.

However, when there was service at Choillean, there was a great gathering, not only in the chapel, but afterwards in the little inn a hundred yards distant, for the congregation came from such distances that baiting and refreshment were absolutely necessary alike for man and beast; and whether the meeting was strictly profitable or held in the spirit of the previous religious observances, it was welcome as the kindly 'crack in the kirkyard,' guttural and emphatic here, to simple parish worthies.

The inn was little better than a 'clay biggin,' and if long kail did not spring from its walls, house-leeks flourished abundantly on its roof. Earthen floors, a 'but and a ben,' the one for the gentry crowded pell mell, the other where the salmon speared the preceding night, the venison ham, the cakes and milk, the claret and usquebagh were prepared to be set before the guests, with a long shed for the few curricles, a longer stable for the many horses, completed the accommodation.

Yet for this lowly stage rather than for the chapel, where it is to be hoped her thoughts were better employed, many a lass wore her unsuitable peach or primrose lustrestring, and her lace mittens, and some lads mounted smarter cocked hats, coats with more glittering cuffs, shoes with more massive buckles. A motley assembly, where all were of one degree—motley as minds, manners, and purses varied. Lairds surly and ill-conditioned as Balmawhapple, clownish as the low country Dumbiedykes, or—rare exceptions—

pedantic and quaint as Baron Bradwardine, or polished men of the world, like the great Duke of Gordon himself; old ladies, who had prayed in their flower for the young Chevalier—withered bodies now with silk calêches over cambric curches, and ivory handled sticks in their stiff trembling hands; and portly matrons with flocks of shy or bouncing daughters, who span still of a morning and danced reels every night.

The Robertsons of Croclune, a half-pay officer's family, very well known, for they were constantly paying or receiving visits even in snow storms; very lightly held, for they were that grasping family in narrow circumstances, of mean ends and aims and foolish and flighty conduct, existing everywhere, and everywhere both tolerated and reprobated. Captain Robertson was a cunning, sharp man, active in his bigness and stoutness, not without a species of good humour, mixed up with every affair in the Country—in request because he did dirty work, but carelessly treated even by these courteous brother Celts, and they were more gracious than Saxons. Captain Robertson did not heed if he gained his object—got the hope of a commission in the Fencibles for his idle son Finlay, married his wildest girl Christie to the sottish, doting commandant of the neighbouring fort, or even sold his hay a few pence the stone higher, or secured an invitation to Flora from the young English lady of Pitfadden, pining in what she considered a dreary solitude. Captain Robertson had the tact of good company,

but he was pushing and brazen enough for any set. Mrs. Robertson was a peevish nonentity—a counterpoise to the exceeding buoyancy of her spouse. Dr. Johnson once blamed a lady for her censure of a neighbour. ‘Madam,’ said he, ‘why do you blame the woman for the only sensible thing she could do—talking of her family and her affairs—for how could a woman who is as empty as a drum talk of anything else?’ As an example of Mrs. Robertson, she could not even talk of her family unless to reflect upon Christie for never coming to see her, and to complain of Nancy for still growing away from her clothes. Mrs. Robertson was now thrown completely into the shade by her daughter Flora, who, though a matron, continued to reside in her father’s house, and united her father’s vivacity to her mother’s helpless spleen. Flora had been, if not the giddiest of the black-eyed, high-complexioned girls of Croclune, certainly the most undutiful and defiant in act. Flora had married off-hand and clandestinely a subaltern starting with his regiment for America. Captain Robertson had discovered the offence, but had been unable to despatch his self-willed daughter to the colonies with the partner, young and reckless as herself, whom she had summarily chosen. Thus Flora remained in the parental house in the debateable position of an unclaimed bride awaiting the return of her husband, frequently ignorant of his stations, and apparently dropped out of his consideration and his very consciousness; and years passed, and the younger mem-

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bers of the family grew up in Croclune as audacious and unbridled as Flora, and Flora still struggled for precedence among them, and dwelt in sufferance under her father's roof, with the reproach of her early imprudence and rebellion clinging to her ; though to do her father and her family justice, they stood too much in dread of Flora's imperiousness and impetuosity to taunt her with her folly. And so Flora grew sharp-featured and thin-voiced, and took to domineering over her companions ; and being very prudish when it did not interfere with her worldliness, grew a gossip, and progressed into one of the most dangerous and vindictive of busybodies and mischief-makers in the Country.

Mary Aldour had no esteem for any of the Robertsons ; she struggled with an aversion to the Captain, but it is to be feared she kept up a regular feud with Flora. Mary was tempted to despise her for her youthful, headstrong passion. She would not believe that a girl so selfish as Flora had been misled by her feelings or by anything finer than vanity and violence of fancy and temper. She did not credit that aught but pride occasioned Flora's tenacious adherence to the expectation of Lieutenant Maclean's orders home. Mary did not believe that Flora still cherished affection for the empty-headed boyish acquaintance of a few weeks. In Mary's eyes Flora's marriage had been sheer levity and wickedness ; and Flora measured exactly Mary Aldour's estimation of her, and through the conventional civilities which she found it convenient to

pay to the standing and sway of Aldour in the Country, she returned scorn for scorn.

There was young Dunglas, by far the most attractive magnet to the Celiax in search of husbands, and, after Pitfadden, the biggest laird in prospective in the immediate neighbourhood. Besides, young Dunglas was a very handsome lad, with the crisp yellow hair and bright though dark-freckled complexion said to indicate some of ‘the purest blood of Scandinavia;’ yet poor Prince Charlie possessed the attractions to perfection. Old Dunglas, his father, was very infirm, and young Dunglas would not be long of coming to his kingdom, his subjects, his glen, and great house—and black cattle, and sheep, and roe deer, and red deer, and clouds of moor-fowl. In the meantime, as he was an only child and motherless, the young Laird led a very isolated, dull life among his primitive retainers and caressing old servants, and was glad enough to ride along and have a romp with the single gay girl left growing up at Croclune without harm intended. He could pay for his diversion by buying a lame horse from the Captain, and lending a couple of his dogs to Finlay. But the Country already coupled his name with Nancy Robertson’s. By good or bad luck his father led too retired a life, and was too full of his own complaints, poor man, to learn the disparaging association.

Mary Aldour was sorry for young Dunglas, and tried to save him from any entanglement with the Robertsons, and that largely from pure disinterest.

edness. To be sure, even Mary considered Dunglas a very agreeable beau, (forgive her, dear reader; every unmarried man was classed as a beau—good, bad, or indifferent—then,) he was so good-looking and good-natured—frank, kindly, brave—that it seemed he could afford a tolerable stock of hotheadedness when once irritated, and an exaggerated sense of his own importance without lessening general and individual regard. Do you remember ‘young Col?’ ‘He is a noble animal; he is a farmer, a sailor, a hunter, a fisher. He is hospitable, and he has an intrepidity of talk whether he understands the subject or not.’ And young Col had the additional recommendation that he could run down a greyhound. And he was made a hero, and his tragic fate was lamented as far as Lichfield, and he had the honour of being apostrophized in the ‘Gentleman’s Magazine.’ Dunglas had all the fascination of young Col, and, in addition, he had gentler attractions. Yes, Mary liked John Dunglas, and thought it would be a thousand pities if he fell a victim to the Robertsons.

It might have just crossed Mary’s imagination that John Dunglas, her neighbour and equal, might seek a nearer intimacy and a life-long connexion with herself. Aldour and Dunglas had gone together in wedlock ere now, and she might be persuaded to think of the matter seriously, and might find it not an inadmissible change of state, and a tolerable prospect for the future; that is, when they were both a great deal older, and the boys were established, and Flora

and Katie had returned from school in Inverluig, and perhaps little Annie had become stronger ; then it might be advantageous to the pair, and a rational scheme for their mutual happiness and prosperity to old age.

So wise was Mary, so cool, so cautious. Indeed, some of her notions on marriage would have astonished the present generations in their teens. She discoursed upon it in her letters quite as an advanced stage of probation. She was rather disposed to negative it in her own case, and if she did enter the arena and wear the yoke, it would be very warily, with very modest expectations of anything but self-restraint, mutual concessions, and mutual forbearance ; this in the midst of, and because of her heroic romances of Ossian and Homer. But these were not the theories of Mary's heart, but of her reason, and perhaps they originated in secret shyness and a dash of affectation. It may read as a paradox, but the very truth of Mary and her friends, conjoined with their strong enthusiasm for nature and art—such as they knew it—in letters, produced in themselves a sort of assumption of the disruption which they recognised between their dreams of battle-fields, conquerors, sacrifices, ovations, philosophers, poets, and Werter lovers, and their actual experience of human nature and its daily occurrences, and originated in them a half-laughing indignation at their being supposed to apply their bombastic poetry, with its woof of fustian and its warp of gold, to their own prosaic cases ; in short, they pretended to a de-

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gree of sententiousness and moderation far beyond what was probable, not to say desirable. Their warm hearts were unawakened to the one master-influence of their lives, and so they cleverly ignored its existence or clipped its proportions, and then argued upon the void or the poor puny dwarf to which they had reduced it very sagely and sometimes very wittily. Do not say that they were hard and masculine and repulsive, these Mary Aldours. Did not the chivalrous genius that rose upon the century acknowledge their charms in his dear friend Miss Cranstoun, and reproduce them invested with the glow of adventure and the glory of his gift divine in *Die Vernon*? But as young Dunglas was in no trouble or difficulty that Mary knew of, save in that tolerably undignified one from the thralls of Croclune, Mary's heart had not really awakened to him, and there was not the slightest indication at present of that fleeting airy speculation of hers acquiring a local habitation and a name. Therefore it was not from mere personal motives that Mary was interested in the liberty of John Dunglas—it was from charity, if charity, of a somewhat one-sided description.

There was Finralia, half-shunned, half-feared by the congregation, and shrugging his shoulders at the whole party.

And there was Anne Macdonald, a low country cousin and visitor at Aldour. This Anne must have her separate chronicle. She was the daughter of a Macdonnel who had rubbed against the prejudices

of his kin by going south, entering into trade, and—greater crime—what sounds irrelevant, losing sight of that spelling of his name, which separated the Glengarry branch of the great sons of Donald from the rulers of Sleat and Skye, like many other relations not more attached because they sprang from the same root. This degenerate Macdonnel, or MacDonald as he allowed himself to be designated, thus disguising any other mean-spiritedness of which he might be guilty, as the true clansmen comforted themselves, in the end made a fortune and died—deeds which caused a posthumous reconciliation with his north country brethren, though they were then more generally sentenced for the royal failing of pride than the beggar's vice of avarice. The trader MacDonald left one orphan daughter to inherit his wealth; she had been reared in the low country on the old aristocratic foundation of the great capital of the west—for it was aristocratic when its first West Indian merchants and dealers with Virginia were slips from Highland houses, and Baillie Nicol Jarvie was a gentle baillie among the baillies of his day—and in Edinburgh, then commencing its old literary renown; and she had come north in due time to visit her Highland kinsmen. But they were not mercenary enough in Aldour to prize her for anything but her clan blood and her claim upon their hospitality. They undervalued her for her ignorance of the Country and its customs, her delicacy and incapacity for their pursuits.

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Had Anne fallen to the share of the Robertsons, they would have paid her homage ; as it was, for all her low country accomplishments and new fashions, the Laird and Mary patronized her, and Mrs. Macdonnel, with a few cordial words and one brief personal examination of the soles of her shoes and the thickness of her petticoats, turned her over entirely to the Laird and Mary. The servants pitied her for her want of acquaintance with their Gaelic as she was on the point of thinking them barbarous because they could not answer a word to her English ; and she was certain they were constantly, in their strange expressions with their impressive gestures, making invidious comparisons between their grand, bright, fair Mary Aldour, who could walk ten miles and ride thirty, row a boat, speak to the minister, and understand farming, sport, and housewifery, and sing ‘Mona Mighnean a Ghibarlun,’ and ‘Macgregor Ruara,’ as sweetly and strongly as any bird, and her poor white-faced, puny, lowland-bred cousin, Miss Anne Macdonald, who could do nothing, not even spin, only sew a bit of muslin and read an English book. There was a subtle distinction in the titles they gave them, Mary Aldour and Miss Anne Macdonald ; it reminded one of the haughty, fine inflections, ‘O’Hara, you are welcome ; Mr. Sandford, your mother’s son is welcome ; Mr. Ponsonby (Earl Bessborough’s son), you may sit down.’ And probably Anne’s admiring friends in the South had imagined, like innocent Mistress Bridget, that something near to ‘a Lon’on

girl,' with London manners, habits, fashions, and dresses, must have a grand success among the boors of the North ! Even Anne's good looks were not of a style to be appreciated by any but the more poetic Highlanders, who have indeed praise of such moonlight beauties in their songs—a delicate, retired beauty, which its opponents stigmatized as 'a face you could cover with your hand,' 'a face not the breadth of a Saxon shilling,' and which by flatterers in the low country was as uniformly termed 'elegant' as Mary Macdonnel's fine figure was distinguished by the same appellation in the North. Anne's soft dark hair, pale but pure complexion and small features, owed much of their charm to their forming in themselves no mask, but the very index of an exceedingly unselfish, unexacting, sweet disposition. It required some cultivation, native and foreign, some knowledge of character and life, or else considerable natural instinct, to hail these signs; hence, probably, the correctness of the common definition, 'elegant,' as opposed to moral vulgarity—as a thing which the morally vulgar cannot even comprehend.

If Anne Macdonald had not been formed of sound, enduring stuff, under her gentleness, she would have taken very ill with the north country air, especially as she had been a little too much of an heiress, a charge, and a darling among her mother's friends; but the old friends had been good people and so were the new, and Anne was good with a singular goodness; for as the Spirit, like the wind, 'bloweth

where it listeth,' so grace descends in no ordinary degree on some chosen heads. Anne at first wondered, was half-amazed, half-piqued by her cousin's unconsciousness of her rights, then with a true queenly heart she laid her crown aside, and enjoyed her holiday of insignificance, and turned and loved the simplicity of those who afforded her the privacy.

Anne was very intelligent too, or she would have wearied desperately in the dearth of her former interests and occupations, for no two lives could have been more distinct at this time, than life in a country house in the Highlands, and life in a city. As we have recorded, books and public opinion had not thrown their glamour over 'the mountain and the flood.' There was a very artificial stereotyped taste for purling brooks, shady groves, rich corn-fields, soft meadows, porticoed mansions, or how would Shenstone, the Whartons, and even Pope and Addison read so delightfully, and how would the vagaries of Anna Seward have been tolerated even under the shade of her father's deanery? Otherwise sentimental travellers from Mrs. Montague to Mrs. Grant carried books in their coaches, and read them on their journeys. Says Boswell, coolly, 'I have a notion that he (Johnson) at no time has had much taste for rural beauties; I have myself very little.' But then, to be sure, Boswell by rural beauties indicates 'fine places' and gentlemen's grounds, and expressly declares that his great friend

came to Scotland to see wild objects—mountains, waterfalls, peculiar manners—only, if you except the last, he did not seem to be more enamoured with the mountains than the molehills. No; the world of taste had yet to discover that ‘the more savage the scene the stronger the hold on the affections.’ However, there were always exceptional minds that could judge for themselves, and appropriate what was sublime, strange, and picturesque, without any teachers; and here was one in a quiet little girl, with the ready sympathy of real mental power. Anne Macdonald turned to everything that was fresh in the landscape and manners around her, and studied them with growing apprehension and satisfaction. She was too wise to be repulsed by the mingled dirt and divinity, whether of human character or of nature on which man had set his seal. To her there was something curiously attractive in the very blending of homeliness and beauty in people and place, as we like the merry measure best which has its pathetic fall, and the tragedy which has its comic interludes. The ‘odd mixture of good sense and superstition, of minute parsimony and liberal kindness, of shrewd observation and a kind of romantic abstraction from sensible objects,’ in the men and women matched with ‘the clachans often found low down in a grassy vale—and then each had its sheltering hill, its clear stream, and its breckan brae crested with gray cliffs and garlanded with birch and hazel. There

was always a picturesque, if not a comfortable arrangement of huts with women and children; often a smithy and a very small mill; sometimes a church, but more frequently only a place of burial.'

All the glen liked Anne, though they declined to elevate her on a pedestal—from Aldour, who was easily pleased, down to poor little fretful Annie, her namesake, who rarely took to a stranger. Mary was certain that she was very fond of Anne, though she had formed just that sort of half-true, half-false estimate of Anne's character which, had Anne been less loveable, or Mary less kindly, would have been enough to have kept them apart—Anne was soft and sweet, and Mary understood her weak and yielding. Though they were contrasted in very many points, there was a curious degree of resemblance between Anne and young Duuglas, not in temper, but in capacity. Both had a facility about them—a quickness of imbibing impressions, a versatility in changing them—innocent and amiable in itself, but capable of harm—what might render them very happy or very unhappy, very fortunate or very unfortunate. Yet Mary Macdonnel never saw the similarity, and perhaps it was very unlikely, when it was in a bold, lively, imperious young man and a mild, reserved girl. The very quality for which Mary had a predilection in John Dunglas vexed her in Anne. Mary did not exactly extol Dunglas for being a keen hunter or cattle-dealer with her father, a fisher with her

brothers, a housekeeper with herself, a sick nurse with her mother, and a tomfool with the Robertsons, but she excused him for it. John Duuglas was so good-natured, notwithstanding his position and his sense of it—when he took it into his head, that it set him wonderfully well to attempt the part of jack-of-all-trades, and he would grow older and more of one pattern. But it did provoke her to see Anne so universally complacent, not in the way of benevolence, but in counting it a treat to hear Pittadden's lady's spinnet, which was so lamentably inferior to the pipes; and in professing herself fit to enjoy a shopping in Inverluig with Flora Robertson, she who had seen the fine shops of Edinburgh and Glasgow; and in getting into the spirit of the thing, and wandering away with no attendant save foolish old Sheelas, half killing herself seeking dye-roots on the mountains. There are partialities which are largely connected with the difference between a man's constitution and a woman's. It is common enough for man and woman to like in woman and man what they would dislike in members of their own sexes. The attraction of reverses holds most strongly between man and woman—it is their friendship which most frequently unites the grave spirit and the gay, the sage and the simpleton.

The company, after the chapel at Choillean, had ate and drunk together with Aldour as master of the ceremonies. Jolly gentlemen had suggested to each other another glass of usquebagh while talking of

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the next market and the last burial. Anxious mothers had insisted on perverse daughters emptying their plates in the intervals of refilling their own—as they asked punctiliously after the health of a whole clan and requested individually the character of Mary Dairy's or Barbara Cook's younger sister. The horses were leading out, and the equipments undergoing a supervision—very necessary, for they would be well-tried on the mountain roads, side cuts from the main lines of the paragon General Wade.

The Robertsons and a few other girls were teasing young Dunglas about his colours at the last games and his partners at the last ball, and asking the names of his dogs, and themselves snapping, under a false show of smiles, at each other and at absent rivals. The most of the remaining young people were slyly scrutinizing the mouldy cupboard, the Delft plates, the wooden-hafted knives, provided for their use. But Mary Aldour was standing at the little window looking out at a little fall that trickled pure, fresh, and free down the mossy rocks where away among the low indistinct mounds were *tomhans* and occasional shattered or crusted, slanting stones which belonged to the old burying-ground—and listening to the chattering of a finch among some waving birch-trees—and thinking that it was not so out of keeping with the solemn truths she had just heard as that other chattering behind her; the little birds might not be furtively pecking each other and openly backbiting their neighbours.

Mary had been well inclined to this meeting at the Choillean inn after service ; she was so genial, that she involuntarily inclined to what was social and friendly, but she felt to-day that much must be expelled from its materials ere it could be becoming the time and hour. (Ay, Mary, and much must be expelled in the downward tenour of our lives ere they be attuned to Christianity.) There was an unlucky freedom, too, in this gathering in the inn, which dispensed with ceremonies and introductions, and, like poverty, made you acquainted with queer company. Mary glanced round with the corner of her blue eye, and detected Finralia addressing Anne Macdonald at her very elbow. If she had heard his words, she would have discovered that he was merely pronouncing a short apology for standing on that troublesome appendage, Anne Macdonald's train, which, while she curtsied and declared 'no offence, sir,' she was hastily dragging through her pocket-holes. But Mary did not condescend to listen to what was not addressed to herself, and so it flashed through her active brain that Finralia was making up to Anne Macdonald. To be sure, Anne's fortune would be a fine thing for the descendant of the old robber chiefs, and Anne was just the quiet, romantic girl to be caught with Finralia's manly bearing, and waywardly touched by his unpopularity, and capable of being rendered perfectly credulous of a black sheep's being washed white.

Oh, fie, Mary ! fie ! where was 'the peace on earth and good-will to men,' of which the angels sang, and of

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which your chapel spoke, if it had a voice at all ; or was Finralia to be excluded from the great boon ; was his case more hopeless than the cases of other sinners ? Oh, Mary, Mary ! take care of a dead faith in a dead Gospel.

How Mary did fidget ! Ladies had not the grand repose then that distinguishes their manners to-day—they were subject to the fidgets and the gapes. We read often of those diseases in the most unexpected quarters ; doubtless there was something refreshing in the exercise to unpolished, rustic minds. Mary munched a bit of cake, and could have poked Anne into any out-of-the-way corner. At last, by dint of calling Anne's attention to the prospect of their home arrangements, she plainly took Anne beneath her wing, and challenged all assailants, and never saw that Finralia was only hanging upon them from amusement at her quick hostility, and that it was John Dunglas who was in reality manœuvring eagerly to approach Anne and to secure the honour of leading her to her pony, and the pleasure of telling her what was most deserving of her attention in her ride back to Aldour.

The aristocratic congregation was dispersing with sufficient noise—the ladies were picking up their gloves, the gentlemen their whips.

‘Oh ! Robbie, Robbie !’ cried a simple matron to a gawky girl, very much ashamed of the notice they were attracting, ‘I have mislaid my Cairngorm buttons for my jacket. Some other lady has taken

them by mistake. Oh ! ladies, will you all look your collars and cuffs ? I got them from Captain M'Sweyn, and he found them, or the stone that made them, on the hill of Fallands, and forby they were a keepsake. I will never see their like again.'

'Never mind them, mother,' implored Robbie, in an undertone, seeing how Flora Robertson and her satellites were exchanging glances, half of mirth, half of scorn and anger at the detention.

'Never mind them, Robbie ! My Cairngorum buttons, that I got from Captain M'Sweyn, when he exchanged into the Black Watch, and I have no more stones to give you bairns, save my light amber beads, since Pitnacree sent his mother's stones to the London goldsmith to pay the mortgage laid on for the fine in the war year.'

'Oh, mother ! they'll maybe cast up,' urged Robbie, in desperation.

'Let me seek for them, Mrs. Maclauchlan,' cried Mary, very much in earnest. 'I have good eyes, I assure you, and I hate to lose a keepsake ; but in case of a mistake, are not these your buttons, my dear madam, shining at your own throat ?'

'Oh ! deed are they, Mary Aldour ; and I am very much obliged to you, with your leave, for discovering them and setting my mind at ease. I have not been so much relieved since I put the pound of loose silver into my saddle-pocket in Inverluig, and every foot that Prince trotted, I heard a shilling fall, and I dared not turn, for the beast had the bit

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between his teeth, and he was not chancy—until I arrived at my own door ; and there I found that Pitnacree had been walking home half a mile behind me and picking up the money, piece by piece, and thinking that such a windfall had not come to the family since Laird Evan turned up the slate quarry.'

A lady's horse was restless, and bogled, flung its head, and pawed the turf as it was led out in the order of the procession—and its owner, either weak-nerved or inclined to ape a fine lady's whims in spite of the bracing mountain air, or secretly incensed at her husband's devotion to the claret and the usquebagh, or his stolid urbanity to a rival laird's wife, showed symptoms of vapours and faintness and spasms, to the discomposure and discomfiture of the rest of the party. Ladies and gentlemen stood back—no gentleman was gallant enough to render assistance, no lady had presence of mind at call, the husband was probably conscience-stricken—till Mary Macdonnel came forward reluctantly, but unavoidably, supported the trembling lady, wet her lips with water, sprinkled her handkerchief with hartshorn, which even Highland ladies carried religiously in case of emergency, patted her horse's head far more heartily, and at last got the sinking lady into the saddle, and saw her ride off, with her recusant lord following doggedly.

' We are really exceedingly obliged to you, Miss Macdonnel,' exclaimed Flora Robertson, sarcastically.

'I don't know what we all did without you when you were at Inverluig.'

'I don't think you could have missed me much,' answered Mary, bluntly, reddening like a crimson rose. 'I cannot accept your compliment; some of you have been independent enough without me.' And Mary could have bitten her tongue out next moment, as Flora swept by her, had she not vowed that morning that she would not engage in strife with Flora Robertson for the next twelve hours at least.

The Aldour party were setting forth with young Dunglas adhering closely to them, regardless of the sharp jests and backward looks of the Robertsons and their friends. But Anne Macdonald's pony was detected limping heavily, with a shoe dangling at its hoof, and as neither chapel nor inn supplied a smith—though he might have found room for his calling and excuse for his employment on the day of rest, already so sounding with ringing fetlocks and jingling bridles—Mary yielded her horse to Anne and agreed to walk home by the foot track over the hills. Anne protested against inconveniencing and imposing upon her cousin, and entreated to be at least permitted to walk with her. Dunglas and other gentlemen offered horses that could be trusted to carry spirited ladies and good horsewomen, but Mary laughed off the proposals, and set off to climb the ascent by the Choillean Fall, and cross the peat moss, and descend the Hanging Shaw, and ascend again by Craig Dhu, all by herself on the

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calm Sunday, assenting heartily to her father's charge, 'See that you do not cause the kipper to be over-boiled, like a clever-footed lass.'

Finralia got the last glimpse of Mary with her light curls fluttering in the wind, and that common attire of the habit drawn easily over her arm ; and although he was not familiar with her ways, he knew intuitively that she would feel as safe for miles over these hills and moors about Aldour as any moor-cock or roe-deer that need dread no sportsman's shot or hound's spring. If she grew weary she would rest without hesitation, and perhaps sing over to herself a verse of one of the chapel psalms, as a harmony in keeping with the wilderness.

Finralia was not good, had known little of goodness ; he laughed at Mary Aldour, but he had a passing fancy that he wished she had been a boy like one of her brothers, and might have made his acquaintance, and then he would not have sullied one of her bright fair hairs—he would have shown her his strength and skill, which won men's admiration and the common people's wonder, though they gave him nothing else ; and of which poor, crooked, fantastic, furious Ussie was proud—he would have instructed her better than any man in the country in the secrets of the game, the otter, the wild cat, the hawk, the eagle, and guided her to their loneliest and remotest haunts ; and then he might have had the kind, brave arm rest on his shoulder as it had touched the stupid old dame's of Pitnacree and the superannuated

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nymph's of Kinglossie ; but it was fated otherwise, and it was not worth a regret, and he could whistle that loss, as well as many another, down the wind, though he knew in his secret soul that he was a forlorn man, at enmity with the good—and with the Great Name which the good take as their guide and stay.





CHAPTER III.

HOW THE COMPANY SPENT THE MORNING AT CROCLUNE.

HOUGH there was no love lost between Mary Aldour and Flora Robertson, the families were not only on visiting terms, but even Mary saw no reason why they should not be so. The Robertsons were neighbours as well as descendants of the clan Donachie—it was a pity that she could not bear with them as Anne did with the most of her provocations, since she could not improve them—but Mary saw no sufficient cause why she should cast a stone at them, point them out to reprobation, or compromise them still more decidedly than they had compromised themselves. (It was only where no previous association existed, or the traditions of her house and country were against a culprit, that Mary was pitilessly implacable.) Thus, when the Robertsons sent down a *ghillie cumserian*, or footman, to summon the Aldour young people to a great haymaking on the green of Croclune, and a dance in the evening on the cropped sward, Mary grumbled and got ready,

with her cousin Anne and her young brother Malcolm, and probably, like the most sensible of young girls, was a little glad of the gaiety and only a little sorry that it was to occur at Croclune.

Anne could not conceal her pleasure in going to Croclune, and Mary could hardly blame her for it. If there was a spot of ground lovely beyond all others in the Country it was Croclune. Mary called it a case of the lowland proverb, ‘The nearer the kirk the farther from grace,’ for she believed its beauty was altogether lost upon the Robertsons except as an attraction to strangers.

Croclune was a rambling thatched cottage, perched on a ledge over the narrow termination of the wide strath into which both Aldour and Finralia opened. But here the strath had thrown off its sober and bountiful character, and broken into extravagance and recklessness. Its rocks were rent and crumpled, and shrivelled and whirled, as if fire-spirits had issued from the bowels of the earth and moulded and grouped them in grim sport, and doubtless fire-spirits had something to do with their conformation. The very land was broken into the most abrupt hollows, the most varied knolls. There was no space for fields within bounds that the eye could reach; the flora that flourished at Croclune consisted of grass and trees; sweet primeval hay was made off these mad, tumbling hillocks; and wood that might have belonged to giants of the forest flourished—sweeping larches, Scotch pines—‘masts for some high admiral’—ash-trees straight

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—stemmed, leafy, and full, or with gnarled branches bent, and twisted, and pendent, like the quivering twigs of the birches, and here and there oaks—umbageous English oaks in the heart of the wild Highlands—all grouped as fancifully as the crags and mounds, standing sentries on this eminence, vanishing down that declivity, waving triumphantly in colossal tufts from the summit of yon jagged pinnacles, or leaning a mossy, hoar, natural bridge over a natural chasm. The wood was not so thick as to hide a broad reach of the strath's river far down below, with leaps—and spouts of its tributary water hurrying down—curving and bending in a water-course parallel to the cottage.

One of the great elements of beauty, where other foundations are not wanting, is the tumult of nature, and the mind on which it makes the liveliest impression is the placid, peaceful constitution, in itself well ordered and sure.

Anne Macdonald was enraptured with Croclune. Mary thought it less sufficing than one's own glen, with its domesticities and ruralities, besides its sublimities. Ben Falloch and Craig Dhu were enough for grandeur. One required in-fields and out-fields, meadow and pasture, herds and flocks, and, above all, people, for home life. A place so romantic as Croclune was very well to go to see, but for a constant dwelling it was like sitting down to sew by moonlight or a beacon signal, or attempting to dance to a clair-shach instead of the pipes. The fact was, Croclune

owned the insuperable objection, ‘ This is no my ain lassie, bonnie though the lassie be ; ’ and poor Mary was troubled by glaring discrepancies between her Ossian and the daily life here. Croclune was peopled by no mighty spirits of the dead or pale shades of those maids who loved and suffered with the great hunters and warriors. Croclune rang to no echo of bossy shield and sounding harp. The Robertsons were not at all like their stately predecessors. Their feats—Captain Robertson’s bringing down the last wild goats ; Nancy’s fishing in the pools (very few gentlewomen had the Amazonian skill and hardness of heart to fish for scaly spoil among Mary Macdonnel’s contemporaries), and crossing the ford with her feet drawn up on her side-saddle and the water reaching to her girths ; Christie’s having climbed the precipice to the Shooter’s Point, and hung her white handkerchief from the alder which grew there, as well as in the ‘ old abbey aisle,’ one morning before breakfast, and that to win not so much as ‘ a new bonnet ’ but a pair of muslin gloves ; and Flora Robertson’s having kept her appointments with the idle subaltern prior to their clandestine expedition to Inverluig, where the irrevocable knot was so heedlessly, recklessly tied—these were performances which had wonderfully little in common with the tragic deeds of the bow and the spear, the solemn invocations, the mournful cadences, the lofty, monotonous cloud poetry, even in action, of the sons and daughters of the far past. Never mind, Mary, though the world calls it mythological or transcen-

dental—Hector and Ulysses, Penelope and Iphigenia, the siege of Troy, the battle of Fingal with Caracalla—the son of the king of the world, formed another study than the bloodless struggles of a ballroom, the flippancy rising occasionally into irony of a London drawing-room, or a country house—or at Rome, or Jerusalem, as the author's fancy flies.

But Croclune was a fine place for a great haymaking, when the weather—given to be capricious and malicious among these magnets of the clouds from June to September, was reasonably propitious. A sweet June day—a sky with pale blue opaque white cloud banks in the morning, with deep blue white fleecy cloud islands at noon, and huge Alps of cumuli rose-dyed in the sunset ; and the mountain streams trickling, bickering, and bounding ; and the little birds all afloat and full-throated ; and the trees stirring constantly, gently waving their gay and green banners, softly bending their young fresh tops. There were patches of bridal Maythorn, too, and golden butterflies of broom, and the first blushing tangled wild roses and gowans, which, though so common and constant all the year round, are seized upon as the signs of summer from the rich Lothians to the black Hebrides—‘the gowan’s in the glen’ mating the ‘westlan winds,’ and ‘the bonny birken trees’ feathered on every spray.

Mary was particularly fond of haymaking in Aldour, when to store the fragrant crop not only all the glen assembled, but the whole family turned out like the Vicar of Wakefield’s household. Then Aldour himself,

and the young Laird when at home, cut, and raked, and spread with the men, and Mary Macdonnel and any young companion within the house, tossed, and at a later stage beat down the hay with the women. Mrs. Macdonnel had been the best worker of any, within Mary's recollection ; but now she only saw the ample refreshments served out, and led out lame Niel and sick Annie to look at the family dining among their vassals, and surrounded by the congregation of dogs, on the tedded masses in the meadows by the loch, or on the rising russet stack which flanked the black peat stack and the brown pea stack—all of them covered with their green roofs of broom behind the offices.

However, at Croclune it was more than a family or glen, it was a neighbourhood who worked, out of honour of the great pasture tribute of the hill countries, and from the zest and glee of labour. And it was a mixed company—one might not be suited in one's partner, and there were contending and clashing influences. Altogether it did not afford the freedom, relaxation, and affection of haymaking in Glen Aldour. There was one thing, it was not a feigned object which convened the company. Haymaking at Croclune was particularly difficult, and it was of extra importance to the proprietor or tacksman of Croclune, and Captain Robertson could not serve his end so expeditiously and economically in any other way as feasting his whole acquaintances and converting toil into frolic. It was at least a more creditable means of spending a

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morning than the cock-fight, the ring, and the gaming-table which then engrossed the early hours of men of fashion ; it was sometimes a substitute, a welcome substitute even to poor, fantastic, extravagant towns-men. Ah ! don't you remember poor Oliver Goldsmith making hay in company with the Jessamy belle ? and beautiful Lady Sarah captivating honest King George ?

' Oh, Mary, this is fairy land ! ' exclaimed Anne Macdonald, as they stood on the foremost terrace—to which representatives from all the glens and hill sides for a score of miles were converging as to a grand centre, and looked abroad on knolls and rocks and luxuriant trees.

' Yes,' Mary answered decidedly, ' it is fairy land—a bigger fairy land.'

' Of course, Mary, it is not altogether like Glen Aldour,' explained Anne quickly, ' I mean in seclusion, repose, and comfort.'

' Now, don't soothe my wounded vanity for my glen's sake,' protested Mary a little impatiently. ' I know that to a Lowlander, a young lady of taste, in short, there can be no Highland place like Croclune.'

' And what do you call yourself, Mary ? ' inquired Anne, amused at the manner in which Mary disclaimed her reparation.

' Well, I call myself an old Highlander about the glen, and a Macdonnel of Aldour to boot. No one can regard the glen—our glen, as we do.'

' No one can consider Ben Falloch as the highest

mountain in Great Britain but the old Miss Macdonnels, or believe that after all your fenced garden produces better blackberries than the peaches in the gardens at Hamilton Palace, because they tasted so to him in his youth and maturity, like Mr. Cormac Macgregor—but I, too, claim a little connexion with the glen, Mary. I have a sincere preference for it in many things, though I was not so fortunate as to be born within its bounds.'

Mary shook her head provokingly.

'I think it is quite true what John Dunglas says,' persisted Anne, 'that every steep has its peculiar bracken and every linn its own foam.'

'Then what white heather has Dunglas, I wonder, if it might be found to fasten John Dunglas's wandering brogue to his own duties? And there, Anne—there I declare comes Finralia! Now, who save the Robertsons would ask well-disposed people to spread grass and break bread and see the stars rise with Finralia? It is shameful,' uttered Mary in an aggrieved tone, as if the world was not wide enough to contain Aldour and Finralia. 'Could you sing the 'Broom of Cowden Knowes' to such as he, Anne? Do you think I would let him hear 'Chro-Challin,' or 'Haytin foam'eri?' demanded Mary, referring to the favourite ditties which she and Anne had dispensed to the company at the haymaking in Aldour.

Anne was doubtful whether they could admit the liberty or impart the delight, but she entered a little

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defence, which had the effect of poisoning still farther Mary's prejudiced mind.

'Flora Robertson made a little apology to me about Finralia five minutes ago ; she observed they could not leave him out ; she says that it is the talk of the country that he and his sister have withdrawn from their associations in Inverluig, and are to live quietly for the rest of their lives. He is a man of consequence already, and Miss Ussie Fraser tells her visitors (poor thing, I wonder who visits her, Mary ? not Flora, she says Miss Ussie has a particular spite at her, and she would expect her to spit at her if she entered her presence) Finralia is to assume the old family position, and he will extend his sway until the Country sees who is the best man in the whole strath.'

'Very likely,' replied Mary indifferently, 'he will begin to add acre to acre, peat hag to bear field ; greed very often follows lawlessness, and it is in the blood ; old Finralia ended by becoming the greatest miser between the German Ocean and the Atlantic ; he was no better on that account.'

'But, Mary, you don't fear that Finralia will take black mail from us to day, because if he attempts it I am not so well provided as Mrs. Maclachlan with her saddle-pocket full of loose silver.'

'Take care that he tries no other tax, Anne—a grasping man has not far to go for cunning ;' and then Mary reflected suddenly, 'I myself will be the means of putting the mischief into Anne's head if I don't

take care,' and was silent, and Anne was ready to drop the subject, and to return to her exclamations of admiration. ‘What will it be, Mary, when the wood has its autumn colouring, or when these stones are dark blocks in the snow, and the burn is hanging with icicles?’

Mary did not mean to make hay like Nancy Robertson, in a tartan petticoat and buff-striped linen jacket, with one of the gentlemen’s plaids fastened over her head for a screen, as a wild Highland girl—neither in silk and gauze, like Pitfadden’s wife, and Flora ; she knew what was fitting, so she carried over her evening dress along with Anne’s, and these were for evening wear. It was still the age of brocades, powder was only on the wane, hoops were not altogether extinguished—the graceful moderation of Sir Joshua, and the impulsive picturesqueness of Gainsborough were just toning down the old stiff costume, and in order to see what an exquisite thing they made it, study some of their early pictures before the French Revolution upset dress as well as kings’ seats. Even plain little Fanny Burney looks lovely in her picture, as we see her in her little hat, trim boddice and kerchief, and flowing skirt. And when a merry grig of a girl put on a fly cap and worked apron she had no need to set that cap at any man—his heart yielded without an assault. Mary and Anne had their brocades and their breast knots for the dance ; but in the morning, while they meant business, they retained their useful riding Josephs, but they tied them up with ribands

and showed their quilted scarlet petticoats, and they had purple and green peacock's feathers—as dangerous as any cockade Jacobite ever started, in their velvet hats, and Mary and Anne were very generally approved of in the assembly.

It was heavy work collecting the hay from the uneven ground of Croclune, and some of the stalwart Highland gentlemen worked harder than they had done since the last shooting season ; and a few of the Lairds' daughters showed, among the cottar women and servants in their snooded hair and bare feet who were mingled with their betters in degree, the superior power of birth and breeding even in their women's sinews. But Mary Aldour and Nancy Robertson were the most active of the labourers—not at all in the same style, for Nancy did it by fits and starts, and wasted a great deal of time in nonsense, and was here and there and everywhere—while Mary worked as steadily as if she had owed Captain Robertson a cow's grass, or the main part of her ken, and received even the praise of her performance sedately. Both were pretty sights, though great contrasts. Nancy, a headstrong, impetuous girl, in a roguish mood—certainly,—

Ta'en like a cowt frae the heather,
With sense and discretion to learn—

glowing with exercise and gambolsome with glee, at the height of her charms—the rosy luxuriant comeliness already too much developed in colour and stature to retain delicacy of proportion in full-grown woman-

hood ; and Mary Macdonnel, slender in her vigour and fair in her bloom, working with an Amazonian grace and dignity.

Poor Anne, in spite of her riches, made no figure on a Highland hayfield, but she was so gentle and cordial, that, like Fanny Price leading off in the absence of her cousins at the Mansfield Park ball, her incapacity served her as well as another person's attainments. Every one said how pleasant the Low country heiress was, and what an acquisition she must be to the family at Aldour.

On a difficult field like that at Croclune, where prodigies of engineering had to be performed, there were many pauses, rests on rakes and forks, snatched seats on half-built or half-dismantled ricks, general chat, or what was termed in the journals of the day, 'private confabs.' It was not the fashion to serve a regular dinner at such rural plays—the great feast was the supper in the evening—but refreshments were sent out frequently, and more than the Primroses ate with entire content among the long swathes and short cocks alike sweet to every sense. And the conversation of the groups was often almost as wise and philosophical as that of the Vicar, and Moses, and worthy Sir William Thornhill. Questions of morality and philosophy were discussed where one now exchanges world-wide news, the last reflection in literature, the frequent tinsel and rare fine gold of what is called repartee. Men started, unhesitatingly, grave social questions, intellectual difficulties, and, above all, points of sentiment and

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doctrine in public places and among gay circles. Personal religion alone was from reverence or scorn kept in veiled privacy. (Girls, like Mary Aldour, who early turned to philanthropy and godliness, unless among classes descended directly from the rapt, enthusiastic covenanters, studied the Scriptures, settled the evidences of Christianity, deduced their duties and strove to fulfil their obligations in strict solitude and secrecy, or in their own mutual, true, tender confidences ; hence their piety was very honest and very original, so far as man was concerned.) Another quandary was for a gentleman of acknowledged erudition to commence instructing the company in such matter-of-fact though weighty processes as tanning, brewing, building, and all modest, intelligent hearers attended docilely, and thanked him when he had finished for his improving conversation.

It was no uncommon thing for a girl, with a reputation for parts and reflection like Mary, to be asked loudly some such unanswerable parabolic query, as—What was her opinion of the possible union of high polish with sincerity ? Indeed, Mary was fortunate in getting so shallow a proposition laid before her when Death and Original Sin, the Art of Government, and the Art of Composition, and the vexed question of the Authenticity of Ossian, were perpetual topics.

Mary was not taken aback ; sitting there under that summer sun among the russet hay, looking round on the unrivalled picturesqueness of the wood, and water,

and tossed rocks of Croclune, she recalled the last letter she had written to her friend in Ayr, or Aberdeen on worldly politeness and unworldly rudeness, and though she could not solve the puzzle, she answered warmly, ‘I don’t know what would become of the polish of the material, but I would rub it off with my own hands sooner than impair the grain.’

‘I have seen softness and frankness combined,’ asserted John Dunglas, in an undertone—for him.

‘What is sincerity?’ asked Finralia.

A lying spirit in the mouths of the prophets was a dire sign of the ancient nation; a mocking spirit on a man’s tongue is a bad indication of the state of the individual.

‘Sincerity is honesty, sir,’ answered Mary, stiffly and haughtily.

‘And what is honesty, madam?’

‘Honesty is truth in deed.’

‘And who is true? Does any man pretend to be more guileless than his neighbours?’

‘Some men try to be upright, I believe, sir; that is, they have their laws of honour.’ Had Mary lived at a later period she might have improved upon her explanation. ‘They have the Ten Commandments, and one of them testifies, “Thou shalt not bear false witness.”’ As it was, she ended the argument—certainly with no want of candour in her own person. ‘I understand, sir, it is only those who have a musical ear who are conscious of tune.’ She spoke defiantly,

for she was touched and she was in earnest ; but many men would have shrunk from her speech as arrogant and unwomanly—they could not be expected to recognise that it was no laughing matter to her, and that her voice had even a passionate emphasis of tone.

No. Captain Robertson condescended to her and patronized her in his cool, light way, when she had turned aside and was out of hearing. ‘ It is a thousand pities that Mary Aldour is so high-headed and menseless in virtue—her mother over again—because the girl is a kind girl in the middle of her flings.’

‘ Do you say so ?’ was asked incredulously.

‘ Upon my honour, she is a fine creature, if you rub the right way—must not go against the grain, gentlemen—rather a Tartar—not like my free and easy girls. Old Sandy Macrae was travelling with his pack from the last tryst, the worse of liquor, gentlemen, as sometimes happens to a poor man, when Mary Aldour saw him just as he drew near to the broken bridge over the Gart water, and I tell you, she walked over and led him across with her clean, firm hand clasping his soiled, shaky paw, and then she ran away from his stuttered thanks and put her handkerchief to her eyes behind the first hazel.’

‘ Oh ! I don’t believe that part of the story ; I beg your pardon, Captain, but I can’t credit it,’ the principal listener avowed plainly ; and indeed it was not an easy matter, on casual acquaintance, to associate

other tears than those of pride, passion, and anguish with Mary's blue eyes, yet the unbeliever had proof to the contrary that very morning.

Anne, still crazed about the scenery, had spent the interval strolling away by the water, appearing and disappearing among the bowery, bosky thickets, accompanied by one or two girls whose places were, in the end, supplied by Dunglas and Finralia. Mary scarcely missed her, or missing her was not greatly troubled by her absence in the company of the traitor Finralia, since John Dunglas also escorted her assiduously—she was only startled by Dunglas's sudden reappearance and his summoning her from the work which she had resumed, in haste and anxiety.

'I am very sorry, Mary Aldour, to tell you that Miss Macdonald has met with an accident—she has been bitten by an adder—she was stooping to pull a vetch and the adder seized hold of her hand; I left her with Finralia, as he knew how to treat the hurt, and came off for you.'

Mary was distressed—she was not only sorry for Anne, though she was too hardly brought up to be terrified by an accident, which is rarely attended with danger, but the occurrence ran counter to all her precautions—Anne away with Finralia—Anne indebted to Finralia for the first support and consolation in a moment of weakness, suffering, and alarm. Of course Finralia would know how to improve the advantage—and no doubt Anne would be quite over-

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come, and would be exposing her girlish softness to him and to any other witnesses who might be present at the scene.

Mary was so put about that she did not measure the agitation of John Dunglas, she even reproached him—‘Why did you let her go where there was danger? Why did you not stay with her?’

‘Do you think I would have suffered the accident if I could have prevented it? Do you suppose I would not have preferred staying with her? If you do you are vastly mistaken,’ declared Dunglas, warmly and indignantly, and they hurried on in silence.

When they arrived at the spot it was certainly Mary’s conscience which reproached her, for poor Anne was sitting on a felled tree very pale, patient, and heroic, repeating that the pain—was nothing, that she was not much the worse, that the hay-making party must not be deranged on her account. The glistening brown adder, still writhing though headless, lay at a distance, where John Dunglas had flung it, after he had relieved himself by its slaughter—a feat of which he had not thought it worth while to make any mention. Finralia, after having applied an herb considered salutary, and wrapped up the hand in Anne’s handkerchief, stood waiting beside her quite passive, and not at all as if meditating mischief, and there was not another spectator of the heroine’s behaviour.

‘It will be nothing, dearest Anne,’ exclaimed Mary,

with her voice as well as her words breaking into a rare caress ; ‘ I have seen my father receive a bite, and his hand was quite well in three days again. Our men are often sufferers when they are among the hay, or barking trees, or cutting peat in particular seasons—I would look at it, but it is better not to unloose it just now. How well you are standing it. I did not believe that you would have been so brave. I would not have endured it so quietly myself—I know I would have bitten my lips and clenched my hand, if I had not cried.’ And the tears actually brimmed up in Mary’s bright blue eyes, as much from a sense of the injustice of which she had been guilty as from sympathy with Anne’s torture. It would all come out in a fit of hearty repentance the first time they were alone together. ‘ I thought so and so of you, Anne ; I was in horrors for your character for dignity and firmness, and I proved altogether wrong ; I am very glad of it ; but I must beg your pardon, and honour your self-command, and call myself an impertinent fool.’ And Anne would laugh and think what a warm-hearted, generous girl Mary was, and what a pity it was that she was not the least bit quieter and slower and more charitable in her notions.

But now an irrelevant voice contradicted Mary, looking curiously, but scarcely rudely at her moist eyes. ‘ Hardly, Miss Macdonnel,’ exclaimed the voice, as if inadvertently ; ‘ your spirit would not fail.’ And it was an evidence how subdued Mary was for the

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moment, that she did not resent the interpolation; she even thanked Finralia formally for his aid, and attended to his directions, since he was learned in bites, scratches, sprains, and dislocations, before she took Anne back to the house.





CHAPTER IV.

THE EVENING AT CROCLUNE.

MHE gathering was spoiled for Mary as well as for Anne, but a doctor who was among the company strongly recommended Anne's remaining where she was, in place of riding over the hills in the heat to Aldour, while at the same time he vouch'd for the absence of all bad symptoms ; and Flora Robertson, pushing aside her mother and representing the mistress of the family, was fussily bent on retaining Miss Macdonald and establishing an everlasting claim on her gratitude, by taking the chief charge of her under her unexpected ailment—very much the conduct which Mary had so liberally attributed to Finralia ; and Anne was no less earnestly desirous that Mary should go down to the company and dance with the rest while she was a prisoner in the best sleeping-room, lying down in the great bed with the tartan curtains which had held the bulk of many a prostrate laird, a victim to the might of claret and punch, or walking restlessly up and down the room, or sitting pensively by the window looking out on the

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enchanting landscape—an Eden which had contained a serpent for her, now more animated and Arcadian than ever—trying to convince herself, good little girl ! that it was a benefit in disguise thus to be taught the instability of events, and tested in temper and heart by being sent away from the gaiety which she would have enjoyed more simply and purely than any other reveller there, thus to commune with herself in the best bedroom of Croclune, tolerably faded, cracked, and soiled, but by no means empty—on the contrary, stuffed according to the custom of the country, which allowed no untenanted space, containing at least one additional bed and three chests of drawers, besides the little shows of tawdry watchpockets covered with discoloured lacquer and broken spangles and the battered posset dish. Mary must go out and dance with the rest of them in the natural drawing-room on the freshly-raked sward, in the intricate figures on which Anne looked down at times whenever she could bear to stand still and watch them wistfully as well as longingly—dance discontentedly, with a spiteful intent to wear out herself and her partners, and so have the sooner done with the diversion, like the mourners with their lamentation—

The sooner it's over the sounder to sleep,
So good bye to the bar and its moaning.

In the Highlands, dancing was then in the height of favour. Even in family circles, where a piper was preserved, and if there was no regular piper there was always a piper off-hand, brothers and sisters, cousins

and followers, danced reels and strathspeys and country dances perseveringly after every sunset, when it was frosty and starry, or snowy and rainy without, and smoky and warm within. ‘Raarsa himself danced with his children, and old Malcolm in his filibeg was as nimble as when he led the Prince over the mountains.’ Nay, when partners and pipers were lacking, ‘one of the ladies played on the harpsichord, and Boswell and Col danced with the other’ in the creditable invention devised for the dilemma—‘the threesome reel.’ Can one bring forward a stronger testimony to the popularity of dancing than the humble suggestion to male pride—the threesome reel? And one loves the cheering spectacle; but think of dancing reels with a heavy heart! Not that they danced reels alone; they still walked the minuet, and practised ‘the Louvre,’ famous as a dance calculated to exhibit a graceful person, and ‘the America,’ designed on a classic idea to commemorate the setting in of the serious and sad enough tide of emigration; and they managed them all on the shaven lawn, for they were not used to over-smooth boards. But think of dancing anything continuously with a craving mind and an uneasy spirit! think of substituting perpetual motion for study, true mental intercourse, or even dexterous, painstaking needlework, not to say a stroll in the twilight in such romantic regions as those of Croclune! Little wonder that Mary Aldour, who danced as if she had passed through the regular curriculum of ‘Inverness, St. Andrew’s, and Edinburgh,’ and who relished the pastime,

once on awhile envied Anne even with her swollen hand and swimming head, and was tempted to covet the cards which only the very old women played with the men in the dining-room over their potations as more rational and diverting than such capering. But it was at least better than to hear Mrs. Robertson simperingly styling the haymaking a housewarming, and an affair only to be transacted once in a lifetime. Now, what could make her say that, when everybody knew the Robertsons had scores of such every season ? And there were the rude fellows who roasted old women, and the bold romps sniggering and tittering, notwithstanding it was a great scandal to be ill-bred in Mary's day, and well-brought up girls were taught carefully to restrain themselves, and to avoid selfishness in society, through fear of the disgrace of the charge. The motive for firmness, benevolence, and courtesy might not be very high, but still it was prominent. Wise girls like Mary lamented the waste of time, and the lowering of the mind from these gracious principles, but one of them at least added, with great judgment and penetration into the genius of her faith for that high-flying era, 'Why should I speak with peevishness of good-humoured, harmless people who show a wish to please me ? Why am I not pleased with trifles, when the best of us are doomed to pass great part of our lives in a manner which our own reflections must call trifling ? But then I should like to trifle in my own way.' 'Shake off the imputation as we please, every one has their mode of selfish-

ness, and I feel mine to be that of running away to solitary pleasures. I repent, will mortify myself, and do penance in gay young company.'

So much did Mary dance in her sky-blue brocade, with her light shining hair rendering her as conspicuous and bright and fair as poor Marie Antoinette at Versailles ; but she retained capacity for observation, and it was while wheeling and bounding and skipping and sliding and marching at Croclune that Mary first guessed John Dunglas's dawning attachment to Anne Macdonald. Whether her partner or her *vis-à-vis*, whether standing at the top or the bottom of a set, whether crossing hands or *dos-à-dos*, John Dunglas was always snatching a moment to lament Anne's loss, and lamenting it so perseveringly and dolefully and with such an air of chagrin, that even Mary's preoccupied mind grew suspicious.

Mary received the light with an odd mixture of feelings. It was flattering to Anne, and to their family as Anne's friends and relatives ; it was the most desirable thing possible for Anne, and would at once save her and her fortune from the danger impending over them from all unprincipled 'sparks,' 'bucks,' and 'maccaroni,' and bring back the gold and the gear to the country where a true Macdonnel would have lodged them at once—but then, John Dunglas. She had never thought of John Dunglas as a suitor for Anne, though now the conjunction struck her as very probable from the first, only she would have imagined that he would have chosen a more spirited and capable

partner. Anne was the best girl in the world, and very intelligent for her opportunities, but a Lowland wife was a sad burden to a Highland gentleman, and the chance was she would pine for the delights of the town and the graces of polite society the moment the novelty of the remote isolated mountains and glens palled upon her. And Mary had thought a passing thought of John Dunglas for her own husband and a veritable son to Aldour. Mary started when this notion recurred to her, sustained one pang of mortification, and then turned a quick laugh on her wounded vanity and cast it from her for ever, satisfying herself most comfortably how heart-whole and very nearly fancy-free she had been, even while in an idle moment engaging in the haziest, most fleeting match-making in the world—on her own account.

And there was John Dunglas at last making up to himself for Anne's absence, by drinking claret within doors and dancing furiously with Nancy Robertson without, clearing the swathes as if they were crossed swords, until Nancy cried in her wild way to Mary as she ran past her, 'Bid Dunglas choose another partner, Mary Aldour; he'll set folk a-talking. Now, if it had been any one else, Flory would have called me aside and read me a lecture, but Dunglas is such a favourite with Flory that he thinks he can do anything.' To poor Nancy, with all her rebellion, Flora's will was still a law to the whole world, and it was evident her own resistance to Dunglas was of the most provocative character.

Flora, in her half-matronly, half-mistress footing, with her sharp jealous eyes demanding respect, and her cheeks growing thin through their high colour; and her very dress, her Mechlin head and lappets and her rich little mantle on her slight shoulders, and her bearing—dancing, as if by compulsion, only one set with Pitfadden, the great man, and another with Cabermusk, the snuffy sexagenarian, who yet snapped his withered fingers and caused his shrunk shanks to sidle through the giddy mazes in compliment to his entertainers and the bonnie ladies whom Flora represented, and whom he kissed roguishly in her person at the conclusion of the feast—Flora only bridling and laughing as at a necessary concession, although she was for ever exacting respect and extorting a testimony to her rigid propriety in her awkward position. Poor Flora! half matron, half maiden, with all her efforts unable to atone for her crowning act of frivolity and indiscretion, and continuing to smart in all her pride and ambition for the unhappy, unbecoming sequel. She came up to Mary, and said carelessly, ‘I must look after that foolish boy and girl, Dunglas and Nancy; he has caught her again hiding behind Corryarrick’s broad back, as good a shield as the biggest rick, or cock, as Pitfadden’s wife calls them; they will expose themselves to the whole Country.’

Mary only smiled, and answered readily, ‘How rosy Nancy looks after all her fatigue among the hay; no wonder she is admired.’ Mary could afford to be careless and pleasant, yet she thought at this moment

it was as well that John Dunglas was Anne's property and not hers ; she would scarcely have relished such rapid and complete transitions, boyish as they were. It was time that John Dunglas ceased to be boyish, if he did not mean to be a boy all his life. No, perhaps it was not well, Mary, not at all well for this world's welfare ; perhaps had John Dunglas loved as you had dreamily indicated, two hearts would not have been broken.

But surely we should have some narrative of Mary's private experience at the dance at Croclune. Looking back into the pages of '*Evelina*,' and '*Camilla*,' and even of '*Northanger Abbey*,' and '*Pride and Prejudice*,' we see that there was a time when young ladies had their adventures during these rational, social, delightful double sets, not only at fashionable watering-places but in country houses, and doubtless on country greens. We remember pleasantly how witty the young clergyman was in his first dance with Catherine Morland, and how he struck the charmingly unsophisticated little girl, and how saucy Lizzy Bennet was to Darcy, and aroused with a vengeance that very indifferent gentleman. But really Mary Aldour had no conquest to boast of, no novelty, nothing but old friends and old partners for whom she had a decided partiality, but who were decidedly commonplace, and whom—not the ruddy dusk descending on rock and water, and beetles humming and bats flying amongst the trees, and colds catching on all sides by those who were not so prudent as Mary, who had not put on

thick shoes for the exigencies of the occasion, and who did not knot up their negligées about their white throats and so were water-proof—could render picturesque and striking.

Mary declined the only opportunity she had of finding herself surprised, puzzled, and interested. Finralia came out, and after broaching the cask for the pipers, made some advances to her, but Mary repulsed them directly, not without a little compunction on account of the service which he had rendered Anne, at which she felt she need not now be captious. Mary was very determined, or various causes might have affected her. She might have been a little softened towards Finralia, and for the very reason that he was in the back ground at Croclune to-night. On other occasions he might receive enough consideration; but at present, before Dunglas and other men with good names, and Pitt-fadden, who was southern enough to follow his wife's lead and treat him somewhat as his agent, and when other girls were showing the cold shoulder to the member of a tabooed family—the Robertsons themselves avoided him, and he was in the strange atmosphere of solitude in a crowd—and had he not been a strong, self-reliant man, scornful and haughty in his own nature, he would have been irritated and affronted by this unworthy treatment. But this alone might have driven Mary Aldour to the opposite alternative, since she loathed hypocrisy and meanness, exalted hospitality as much as any old

hero of Fingal's brotherhood, and was never tempted to follow a multitude to do evil.

Again, if Mary had been less sensible, less pure and lofty in her standard, and really less modest in her estimation of her own powers ; had she lived in a generation when young ladies are more forward and sillier in their best inclinations, she might have been misled into a foolish, sentimental project to reclaim Finralia—into a dangerous philandering with his evil reputation and his hard heart—she might have meddled with what was out of her sphere—she might have marred the little good that was in him and the great good that was in herself. As a general rule, women like Mary Aldour had better let men like Finralia alone—the broken must be kept separate from the whole ; more good is done by a virtuous woman's protest against vice—by her broadly righteously, and faithfully employing her veto against the sinner, and refusing to extend to him her notice and admit him to her regard, than by attempting to cure his disease, taking upon herself to become his preacher and teacher, when to her self-conceit and arrogance may well be addressed the warning, ‘physician, heal thyself.’

But there must be exceptions to general rules—there must be over and over again a case where a man reared in wrong and ignorant of right—sullen and snarling, perhaps, but who has come to grope after nobler things—turns instinctively to his original companion, and says to the help meet whom God

gave him to be sister and spouse, ‘Will your faith, gentleness, and charity not help me? My fellow-man may not credit my state—I shrink from expressing to them my discontent with the past, my yearnings for the future. If you will have nothing to do with me, if you cannot trust in my justice and generosity and common gratitude not to return evil for good, then am I surely given up of my kind.’ Such a man will recoil from a negative doubly wounded and trebly savage, while sedulously concealing his hurt.

Unquestionably Mary Aldour’s austerity, evincing that her aversion to Finralia and his race was deeply rooted in the very fibres of her nature, was far from beneficial to Finralia. ‘So,’ he thought, ‘Ussie is right. They are none of them any better than they should be. Poor Ussie is worth a thousand of them. Even this Mary Aldour, who could pity old Duncan Macrae, holds the scales with a false hand. She will not look at me. Pho! she is at Croclune; and what is Flora Robertson, and what does Flora Robertson de-serve; she may thank her father’s position for limiting her wilfulness to arrant folly. And there is that wild thing Nancy, as worldly as the rest of them—her naturalness, the only thing that rendered her bearable, sadly impaired—though, no, I must say she always prefers John Dunglas—he can play the ass more entirely and with greater spirit than I can. But Dunglas, how they all smile upon him—high Mary Aldour and all—and what is Dunglas? To what has he been exposed to test his merits? A

pretty man, but a guarded, flattered, spoilt lad—light-minded, too, and a tyrant when he is contradicted. Dunglas will turn upon these men and women one day, and pay off a part of my debt. Tut! the world may wag as it will for me. What do I care for its opinions? Not a bode. I am here for my own pleasure, and Ussie and I can keep grim house in the glen of Finralia without respect to them, by their leave.'

Thus the gloamrig descended and the stars rose on discontented hearts on the bonny green of Croclune as in any fashionable ball-room in London.

The supper was served in the dining-room, emptied of its drinkers and card-players. A haymaking supper as to genuine haymakers—abundant rather than rare in its provisions. Mutton, venison, kid's flesh, crow pies, and the innumerable preparations of milk which the country sported at every table, from its castles to its huts, and which stood satisfactorily for confectionery. There were the usual blustering speeches and toasts, in which the whole company seemed to unite for the purpose of deluding themselves and each other—the roof tree of the Robertsons, which no one thought very honourable, but which they sounded with fiery Highland halloos, the praise of Captain Robertson, whom nobody reckoned anything better than a convenience, and who regarded his guests in the same machiavelian light. Primitive as the district was, the familiar songs and the sentiments all were gone through, and the worst of them

was, they detained the guests in one neighbourhood for three or four mortal hours, for no one dreamt of rising from the jovial table after they had once sat down to it till they started homewards. Of course it was moonlight, or else even Captain Robertson could not have had the face to invite them and their ponies and runners over the mountains ; but a few stubborn souls remained and had their keg of spirits, and their smart boy laid down in the corner ready to rise and speed with the boiler of hot water as often as they summoned him—as we have regularly chronicled. And Mary also had reluctantly sent home Malcolm with a message for the canvas car, and trespassed farther on Croclune throughout the small hours, though she neither drank nor sang nor cheered, as the completed penalty of Anne's ill-timed pursuit of botany, ere the girls returned with a new day—sick and sober to Aldour.





CHAPTER V.

FINRALIA IS WELCOME AT ALDOUR.

ONE forenoon a few weeks afterwards, when Anne's hand and arm were perfectly well, and the haymaking of Croclune had dwindled into a memory pleasantly enough perfumed by the recollection of the fine weather and the beautiful landscape, and the crowd of acquaintances which it bore—as commonplace enough events in the past, when we take them out of our mental storehouses, are often found to have been laid up in lavender—Mary Aldour and her cousin Anne were together in the sitting-room in their morning suits of linen and little caps. ‘The true Highlander never wears more than a riband on her head till she is married. The ladies, all except the eldest, are in the morning dressed in their hair,’ was a fashion despatched to Mrs. Thrale; but that was in the islands. On the mainland they could have already said,

Scotland be turned an England now,
and they could have displayed undress coifs to match

ittle Burney's cap—‘the handsome cap wanting the vile bandeau,’ which Johnson himself deigned to commend in the good old days, when the growling, but gracious old man ‘trimmed up his favourites’ and ‘played them off finely,’ to their hearts’ content, at fine Streatham.

The girls were in the low-roofed, oak-panelled, cupboard-surrounded parlour, with its carpet of a tartan check, and its deep small windows, like the beds at Cro-clune, hung with the same material; but it did not need flowers, and old China and Dresden, embroidery and a few books and children’s toys, to brighten it; these girls would have embellished it sufficiently in the darkest day of winter, instead of the season when the glass door stood open into the hall—and thence the eye could travel to the honeysuckle porch through which one had a delicious cool glimpse of Loch Aldour with its broken frame of birch-trees, and purple and green mountains. But what a view there was from that honeysuckle porch, or the ridge before the house! How mossy looked the round shoulder of Ben Fal-loch—how sharp the peak of Craig Dhuw—hat shadows upon the loch—what mists upon the moun-tains—what golden or silvery glories in the flowery corries—what clear grey or hazy blue marking the outlines!—No words could indicate the superiority in shape, and colour, and endless variety of Glen Aldour over an English park, common, or woodland. Yet these girls would have filled the room more charmingly with their good, glad presence to any one

who would have been permitted to examine their occupations and who could have read their minds, than even the reflection of the glorious outer world.

Mary was weaving lace borders for her mother's caps, with an orthodox pillow and bobbins, as industriously, and very nearly as successfully, as an English cottager, and was conning over these statistics, of which she never wearied—she verily believed if she did not run them over every morning, half the prosperity of Aldour would be lost. ‘The tailor comes to-morrow week, I must take care to go to Lettach before then ; I cannot be spared from the seams. Let me see, the girls *wauk* the cloth to-morrow, and they go up to the shielings with the new cogs, to ask after the ailing calf, and bring down the butter and cheese the day after. I dare say Anne will want to accompany them ; we could spend the day and travel down in the cool of the evening. I wonder if she is able for the journey : we will see what kind of figure she will make to-day on Ben Falloch.’

‘I say, Anne,’ in direct address to Anne, who was writing in her commonplace book, ‘is your heart failing you yet in prospect of “the dreary mountain,” as Pitfadden’s wife distinguishes it ?’

‘No, Mary, my mind is made up,’ Anne answered, nodding decidedly ; ‘though I must say you’ve done your best to discourage me. Why will you forget that I, too, belong to Aldour ?’

‘And so must perform the pilgrimage to Ben Falloch—poor Anne ! But never mind, Anne, I never

did it myself out and out till to-day, when I hope to reach the cairn. I was only as far as the Roebucks' Spring before—think of that, Anne! and I have been so lucky as to spend all my life in Aldour, except the time at Inverluig, and although I was very busy and acquired such dear friends there, I grudged it sorely.'

Mary was speaking half-jestingly, but Anne took up the tale quite earnestly.'

'You have been very happy, Mary.'

Mary was propitiated and a little touched by the admission. What, after all, was the lowland-born, town-bred orphan heiress, Anne Macdonald, to Mary Aldour, grown up in the glen of her kinsfolk. 'My mother has done hearing Niel and Annie their reading lessons, I see them away to the swan's nest; that is part of a Highland matron's duties, Anne, if she does not go so far as to instruct the ignorant gillies and slips of girls. Of course, all her own people come to her for advice, recommendation, and assistance. And there is Alister, the piper, begun his daily walk and tune in the hall. How odd you thought it when you first heard his drone get up, and asked if we were serenaded at noon in the North. Anne, I must carry you to visit the old lady at Uambeg, she is the next curiosity after Ben Falloch; she still spins with her distaff, and she has a magic bloodstone, and her maids dare not sit down before her. Girl, her lips have been pressed by the heir of a king. When the poor Prince began his campaigns he passed her father's

gate, and she came out with her sisters and begged permission to kiss his hand, but he took her round the waist, like a gentleman, as she will tell you, and ‘pried her mou’ instead. Ah, Anne! the poor Prince was a sad pickle for breaking women’s hearts. There, my father will be coming in to dinner presently, and I must go and see that the long kale and the salmon are on the hall table; and the barley broth, and mutton, and trout, and the frothed milk, and our bilberries ready to be served here, for Marac is slow. “The barley broth, and mutton, roast and boiled, on the table together,” and “the breakfast-table polluted with cheese,” do you remember? How cruel it was in the Sassenach More to be so critical when the poor eager Highland bodies were for ever clamouring, “Toctor Shonson! Toctor Shonson! your very good health!” Will you be as particular and satirical when you get back to refined Embro? And I must get ready our provisions for the mountain. You are very much mistaken, Anne, if you think we will reach the cairn on Ben Falloch without halting and eating ever so many snacks on the way, and we must drink a drop of mountain dew all round—we must, you stupid Anne, or my father would have to carry you down slung on his back as the keepers carry the deer. The sowens will be boiling in the great pots, and the *claars* and the *krogans* of milk set out, and the dogs barking in the glen before we come back.’ And Mary, exhilarated by the extent of business before her, rose up humming a verse of ‘Haytin foam’ eri,’ in honour

of Alan of Moidart, who fell at Sherriff Muir, a verse which has been translated—

Along, along, come haste along,
For here no more we'll stay,
We'll braid and bind our tresses long,
And o'er the hills away;

and found a little leisure, after she had deposited her work in one of the curious worked ivory boxes, with a copy of verses pasted inside the lid, which all ladies carried about with them, and in which recipes, wonderfully genuine poems copied out of the corners of newspapers, were sometimes blended with a little snuff-box, for show not use, a thimble, and scissors, and elaborate huswife—which Mary fondly contemplated, in its minutest pocket, as the gift of one of those girlish friends—on holding a soul's communion with whom she depended justly, even when her nimble hands and feet were stiff with rheumatism, and her bright blue eyes dim and frosty with age. (These fervent, faithful friendships, retaining a lively, yet deep sentimentalism to the last, do they not somehow remind us of Germany, and Schiller and his Charlotte, and great, erring Goethe?) Mary was free to step across the room and contemplate Anne's performance.

Such young ladies not only laboured after good penmanship, but from the slender, rarely renewed stock of their libraries they found occasion to practise their accomplishment in volumes of polite extracts which they were enjoined to make (not quite so interesting and characteristic as Mary's book of pasted

together letters), but still curious as leaving traces of the tastes of the collectors when they did not follow beaten tracks. Not only such amateur courses of reading existed in thousands of MSS., but that was the date of abridgments of all kinds, table talks, memoranda of great events and great men ; and Mary Aldour was fond of what would appear to us very fragmentary study ; her vigorous mind seized a scrap and enjoyed its terseness, and her active habits at once imparted and rendered necessary a keen mental appetite and a rapid digestion. Had it been otherwise, Mary must have written with a merry country-woman, ‘I must after seven years’ experience confess with deep mortification and due reverence for that exalted character, that the person who would be a notable housewife must be that individual thing only, and not mar the main affair by an attempt to introduce separate and subordinate excellences.’ It was reckoned a marvel in Mary Aldour’s quarter, that she combined information and wit with usefulness ; however, the marvel was tolerably general amongst the first literary women of that age.

Mary and Anne were somewhat original in their tastes, and at the same time quite apart in their private bents ; thus Mary could not help exclaiming, ‘I wonder, child, you can waste your time recording such everyday trifles, when you can have the real trees and plants at any moment. They are everything in themselves, they are nothing in a copy. No painter can catch their dyes ; and when we can have the originals,

who wants representations? They are only mighty tiresome to peruse,' for Annie was copying an observation of the great Bacon's, not on divine philosophy, but on the fresh, sweet, simple attendants of the seasons:—

'For March there come violets, especially the single blue which are the earliest, the early daffodil, the daisy, the almond-tree in blossom, the peach-tree in blossom, the cornelian-tree in blossom, and sweet-brier. In April follow the double white violets, the wallflower, the stock-gillyflower, the cowslips, *fleur-de-luces*, and lilies of all natures, rosemary flowers, the tulip, the double peony, the pale daffodil, the French honeysuckle, the cherry-tree in blossom, the damascene and plum-trees in blossom, the whitethorn in leaf, the lilac-tree.'

Now Mary, who loved the least blade of grass in Aldour, and knew the exact situation of the earliest primrose, and the latest St. John's wort, and the week when she could find the first wild rasp, and the last crowberry, as well as she knew her bedchamber and the hour when she should go to bed, could not understand the need for such chronicles; she would have preferred the moral philosophy. Her commonplace book was full of axioms of sterling duty and examples of shining merit.

'Heaven being my aim, grant that I may go through honour and dishonour, good report and bad report, prosperity and adversity, with some evenness of mind.'—*Lady Russell.*

'Never was any of her sex born with better gifts of the mind, or more improved them by reading and conversation. Her advice was always the best, and with the greatest freedom mixed with the greatest decency. Never was so happy a conjuncture of civility, freedom, easiness, sincerity.'—SWIFT's *Character of Stella*.

'She dare go alone and unfold her sheep in the night, and fears no manner of ill, because she means none; yet to say truth she is never alone, for she is always accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts, and prayers, but short ones.'—*The Milkmaid*.

'Let it suffice to name Boadicea, and if her endeavours did not meet with the success of an Alexander, a Cæsar, or a Charles of Sweden, in his fortunate days, her courage and conduct were such as render her worthy to be considered equal, if not superior to them.'

—SOPHIA'S *Modest Vindication of Women*.

'She went to her death with an unshaken firmness of mind, and without changing the colour of her face, and thereby discovered the nobility of her descent to the spectators. Thus died Mariamne; a woman excellent both for chastity and greatness of soul; but she wanted moderation, and had too much of contention in her nature; yet had she all that can be said, in the beauty of her person and in the majesty of her conversation.'—*Josephus*.

Mary admired such tales as Damon and Pythias, and Philippa of Hainault, interspersed with the narrative of the 'Fool of Quality,' and could tell them by

heart with the greatest zest, though she would not have cared to resemble the lovely shepherdesses whose nets in the wood the gallant gentleman spared, or the two very fair shamefaced girls, whom the still more gallant Sir Joseph Jekyll styled in court, not ‘spinsters,’ but ‘lilies of the valley.’ She enjoyed the charges, ‘*Fie Harriet*,’ says my lady, ‘what does the girl blush at? You are handsome and well shaped, my dear, and have nothing to be ashamed of, that I know. No one blushes now-a-days except silly country girls who are ignorant of the world. But do not let your face be a town-crier, Harriet, to let everybody know what you have in your mind. To be ashamed, my girl, is the greatest of all shames.’ ‘I must further advise you, Harriet, not to heap such mountains of sugar, nor to pour such a deluge of cream into your tea; people will certainly take you for the daughter of a dairymaid. There is young Jenny Quirp, who is a lady by birth, and she has brought herself to the perfection of never suffering the tincture of her tea to be spoiled by whitening, nor the flavour to be adulterated by a grain of sweet.’ ‘I was talking a while ago of young Lady Jane Quirp; there’s a pattern for you, Harriet; one who never likes or dislikes, or says or does anything a hair’s breadth beyond the pink of the mode. She is ugly, it is true, and very ill-natured; but then she is finely bred, and has all the becoming airs of a miss of distinction.’

For anything farther, Mary loved either some-

thing overpoweringly ludicrous, and laughed as loud as the children at Gulliver's Brobdignagian mistress's cat, as large as an ox, and purring like the noise of a 'dozen stocking-weavers at work,' (indeed Mary was great in Gulliver,) or she relished sombre, visionary tragedies and impassioned dramas. Fingal Mac Ossian, Werter, Clarissa Harlowe ; condemning here and applauding there in perfect independence of the author's will and pleasure, but prizing the whole immensely, able to aver like hearty Mrs. Thrale, 'I laughed over it, and I cried over it.'

Again, Anne rather shrank from such strong meat, and delighted in the 'Vicar of Wakefield' and Shenstone. Anne was either stunned by the noise of Mary's favourites, or felt with a subtle instinct which Mary's more powerful but ruder intellect wanted, every time they were stilted or bombastic, and so had her admiration sadly qualified, and was, against her own wishes secretly displeased and disgusted by their rhapsodies. Anne's mind resembled the genius of Sir Joshua ; a sweet, thoughtful common sense and an exquisite propriety were among its marked attributes.

All at once the girls were disturbed by the entrance of Aldour and a companion. They heard his voice and that of a stranger in the porch—no uncommon incident, but rather discomfiting on the day of an excursion. A moment Aldour and his friend lingered to hang their plaids if the day happened to be cold, and their bonnets at any time on the stag's

horns in the hall, and then they entered, Aldour and Roderick Finralia.

Mary was amazed. Her father was a man of many guests—if he did not equal the old laird who sat at a cross-road and waylaid every comer, he was not far behind him—drover, tacksman, and laird, lawyer, merchant's clerk, tradesman's representative, and travelling mechanic were welcome to Aldour—the gentle to the parlour, the simple to the hall; and Aldour chatted with the lowliest, and gave and took the news of the country with simple glee, as the Antiquary with the Bluegown, as Henry Brooke with old soldiers and Irish trampers. From this royal hospitality Mary Aldour had learned true breeding, royal condescension, the frank dignity which does not forget its owner's place in life—Highland lairds and ladies rarely did so—and at the same time stoops very gracefully, and rebukes the insolence of a later generation and a niggardly nurture. Among the multitude of arrivals at Aldour there were innumerable guests whose place was neither in the parlour nor in the hall, but who by a punctilious courtesy were always admitted to the Laird's particular court. To these clumsy, awkward mortals Mary had been taught by her mother's example and her own taste to be scrupulously attentive and kind; not a lord in the land would have received more careful notice from Mary Aldour than did the proud, bashful farmers' sons, or the worthy, vulgar shopkeepers, upon whom, be it remarked, superior intercourse produced supe-

rior decorum. Old north country ladies were wont to boast that they had been accustomed to be treated with more consideration and delicacy by a Highland drover than by a Low-country laird.

But Mary had never been tried by such a presence as Finralia's. High and low her father might summon to his board, but a man from the evilly-regarded glen—a Fraser and a Finralia, who had betrayed his trust, who had sold his faith—Mary would not have believed it. She remembered what she had said of the Robertsons for admitting him along with the whole country to Croclune, and she was excessively vexed to see him brought alone to Aldour. She had ceased to fear his neighbourhood for Anne, whose notice she was persuaded was bespoken ; but she thought it could not be in the heart of man, not in the heart of a disreputable, insolent man like Finralia, not to let her feel, ‘ You refused to acknowledge me at Croclune, Miss Macdonnel. Now how will you act when your father introduces me to your intimate acquaintance beneath his roof-tree of Aldour ? ’ Yet Finralia did not swagger ; he greeted the girls distantly, while he looked about him and waited for farther demonstration. He must have had some interest in the house of Aldour, so long shut against him and his fellows ; he must have perceived tokens that he could not understand, or at least which were foreign to him. No such atmosphere of domestic comfort and quiet intelligence did poor Ussie breathe around her at Finralia, no such friendship was Ussie's ; they had

not been his mother's ; Finralia's experience of women had been of a very different description.

If anything could have cut Mary more to the heart than her father's partisanship of Finralia, it was Aldour's disordered, anxious air. Ordinarily, Aldour had a grand confidence in the character of his house. He was hearty and he was cordial in his honest, ponderous way, and he had not a qualm as to the perfect reception and entertainment of his guests. But on this occasion he was evidently nervous over the family bearing to Finralia. He was feverishly glad to see him, extravagantly pressing of his claims. He wiped his forehead with his bandana and pushed back his wig while he looked at Mary's and Anne's curtsies ; he fretted because Mrs. Macdonnel did not come in quickly from her herb-garden ; he fumed because Marac or Farquhar, or any or every domestic, did not serve refreshments at an unaccustomed hour, while Mary perceived nothing amiss. Her mother, after her first start, was composedly civil ; Anne, though confounded, was invariably gentle ; she herself with hot cheeks was remembering what was due to a stranger in their dwelling. Marac and Farquhar were hurrying to set aside the dinner and offer a more temporary supply of viands. True, Annie and Niel and even Malcolm ranged themselves in a row, much as if they had been placed there for the stranger's inspection, as good mothers were apt to rank their children, as Lady Errol favoured Johnson and Boswell with the goodly show of her six daughters and two sons—and doubtless

whatever the great lexicographer might think, and he was a bachelor, the homely Countess's heart swelled more proudly at the sight of the round-faced troop than at the possession of the Slaines Castle which they came to view—and they stared at the bearer of the only familiar name in their vocabulary whom they had never seen at Aldour—possibly they had imagined him a species of ogre—and Annie did whisper to Mary, was the otter-hound at Finralia's heels the dog which tore the kids in the spring? Farquhar always said the trespasser must come from Finralia. But what could be expected from children?

Yet Aldour was so dissatisfied, and so strained the point of honour, that, on an impulse as it seemed, to the stiffening of his wife's good manners, he insisted on Finralia's remaining to share their dinner—their pot-luck—and accompanying them afterwards to the top of Ben Falloch; and Finralia assented, as a matter of course, in his cold, careless way.

Mary fancied her ears were deceiving her—hoped her father was not *fey*—supposed that when such an unaccountable event had come to pass, Dunglas, of course, would not arrive to join the party. Mary had only reckoned on the coincidence from ‘the easy, sauntering, playful, humdrum way’ of their late intercourse with John Dunglas, and we have all observed how, in such cases, persons ‘become more and more necessary to each other, because, in fact, they see no great motive to care for any one else,’ and having expressed the preliminaries so easily, we have most of us witnessed

the end ; or, if we have not, we have read how the Crawfords and the Bertrams fell into daily walks between the Park and the Vicarage, and riding-lessons on the pony, and dancing, and singing, and even acting together, in the mornings and evenings, and so—and so—Edmund Bertram was fascinated by Mary Crawford, and Henry Crawford by Fanny Price, and, alack ! alack ! Maria Bertram and Julia Bertram both ran wild after the same gay Lothario, Henry Crawford, and disturbed the courses of true love and reversed the natural conclusions. John Dunglas had been shooting, fishing, buying oats, appointing fanks, and settling the marches of his father's property, as Mary soon discovered, three times a week since Anne Macdonald arrived in Aldour ; and on one of these recent occasions Mary had mentioned, incidentally, ‘ We mean to climb Ben Falloch on Wednesday. My father has business in the morning, but he can spare us the afternoon. We cannot find another day, and it is getting on in the season, and there will be danger of harvest work interfering ; we had better “ take the wind as it blows in our barn door.” What is your opinion of the weather, Dunglas ? ’ And Mary had felt quite sure beforehand, that if young Dunglas were shy of volunteering his escort at first, he would none the less appear on the scene at the moment of starting, with some lame enough plea of bait, or game, or her father's advice on the bench, and then and there he would be told off for the expedition without farther ceremony.

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But since Finralia had entered in his room—since Finralia was to ascend Ben Falloch with them—Mary Aldour would not be at all surprised if John Dunglas played them false—after he had got sufficient hint for an eager gallant—and chose to miss the honour altogether. The single untoward accident disposed her to such gloomy views of human nature and human affairs in general.





CHAPTER VI.

MARY ALDOUR THROWS DOWN HER GLOVE TO FINRALIA.

MARY made up her mind to the hardship. ‘A cat may look at a king,’ says the proverb; and really the bad odour of Finralia was not aggravated by anything of its pristine freshness. The worst that Mary knew against him was—that he was Finralia, that he had not only drunk his bottle when a boy—which was no great offence in those days, and neither was it held an extenuation that after an excess he took an oath and drank no more, as drinking was considered—but he had consorted with all the bad company in Inverluig, championed wicked, unhappy Mrs. Mercer, and been actively engaged in the riot on which her father sat, when the town’s officer, the officious, imprudent little man who had interfered with gentlemen, had been all but murdered in their hands. All that had happened when Mary was a girl, and might have been forgotten. See, her father had lost sight of it. All that was established against Finralia at the present moment was his ill name and his

ill look—that shrug of the shoulders and glance of defiance branding his comeliness—and his biting tongue—the weapon for which Miss Ussie was notorious. There was no right reason why Mary should not endure his company, since her father willed it. Above all, Mary and her mother, independent, energetic women as they happened to be, were not composed of the stuff which indulged in sour remonstrance, and snappish, but weak resistance ; they might, in the language of the country, show the cold shoulder to Finralia, Mrs. Macdonnel might be stately, and Mary silent, but they would never shame Aldour to Finralia's face, they would never taunt Aldour behind Finralia's back. Aldour was their superior, their head, their chief, and these strong women, however tried, are unflinchingly loyal to a divine right.

And young Dunglas did not disappoint any clinging, affectionate heart which counted on his support up the steep side of Ben Falloch ; and Dunglas was not a bit put out by the unexpected addition to the pleasant circle ; he was not accountable for the company at Aldour any more than at Croclune, and probably John Dunglas was at once a little more liberal and a little more heedless than Mary Aldour ; and John Dunglas was not at all troubled about Finralia's entering the lists for a certain prize ; he had no thought of rivalry in that direction. Not that John Dunglas was very confident and sure ; with all the frank, buoyant imperiousness which was winning to

most people and distasteful to Finralia—that was a great mistake—he really resembled Anne Macdonald, and he covered a great deal of self-distrust and susceptibility to the claims of others under his mingled vanity and gaiety, but he had really had no cause to pick a quarrel with Finralia ; such a fallacy had existed only in Mary Aldour's brain. Finralia was no ladies' man, and if he looked at either of the girls John Dunglas was well convinced it was at Mary herself.

It was Mary who was in imminent danger of being baulked in her aim. Mary, who was turned of nineteen, had lived, child and girl, in Aldour, and never yet stood by the cairn on Ben Falloch—and on the summit of Ben Falloch every Macdonnel of Aldour must plant his or her foot once in a lifetime at least, else the clansman or clanswoman had failed in a part of his or her obligations. Lads and men made a boast of ascending the mountain every summer in the misty mornings when the veil was rending asunder, and under the golden noons or the slanting sunbeams, but never at nightfall or after darkness, though the full moon sailed across Craig Dhu and mirrored itself clear in Loch Aldour. Girls longed for it as one of the grand undertakings of their womanhood ; old caillichs reverted to it as the chief 'ploy' of their maiden days ; and Mary was to be disappointed after all !

Little lame Niel had taken a violent fancy to join the cavalcade on his sure-footed sheltie, and good little beast as Robin was, it was out of the question to

lead it the whole way, or to propose to pull it up, what was no better than the brow of a precipice. On any other occasion, or for any other child, Mrs. Macdonnel, the ruling spirit, would have dismissed the whim with a peremptory refusal, but Niel was systematically indulged in such requests. He was a precocious lad in understanding, but, from his infirmity, disposed to a sedentary life, and it was difficult to induce him to take exercise voluntarily in the open air. He was not peevish, like Annie, but he was excitable and morbid, with a tendency to gloom. An overture of Niel's to activity and recreation was certain to be hailed at any sacrifice. Therefore Mrs. Macdonnel turned to Mary, and observing that Mary knew she was compelled to remain at home to overlook the women who were not at the shieling, and whose wheels must be bare before the others returned for the harvest, and in order to take care of Annie, she stated that Niel fell to his sister's charge, as Malcolm and the tacksmen's sons were not discreet enough, any one of them, to be trusted with him. Mary had better only go the length of the Roebuck Spring with him, when the lad would have had enough of the toilsome adventure, and the two could rest there till the others came down again, or they could return together, and Mary would help her to prepare the supper for the others, as Mary and Niel pleased.

The proposal was made coolly and composedly, as if Mrs. Macdonnel asked no great thing from her daughter, nay, as if, had she found it necessary to test

her submission and demand a huge holocaust, the mother would have performed her share of the deed without a doubt of the daughter's acquiescence. Indeed, the fashion still held good not only in implicit but in long-protracted deference of child to parent. Did not much-admired, high-spirited Lady Loudun at ninety-three send her daughter, Lady Betty, aged seventy, to bed after supper, 'for girls must not use late hours,' while she sat up to entertain the company? Think of the resolute old woman! Hear this, ye degenerate and disobedient moderns!

Mary Aldour was accustomed to such trials of temper, and she did not love her mother and her brother the less for them; she respected her mother for exacting the debt, she respected herself for paying it; she would not for the world, not for the rose and purple blood of the sunset on the crown of Ben Falloch, and the blue darkness of the summer gloaming in the glen beneath, have missed the call. Anne, standing there, longing to relieve her, dare not propose to assume her place, though she was aware that Mary's heart was just so much the more set on Ben Falloch, that her associations with it were a thousand times more numerous, and her whole constitution ten-fold more intense than Anne's; and they started with this setting aside of the principal person, the proposer of the scheme, the purveyor for the wants of the excursionists, the spurrer-on of the whole achievement, fully understood, though Finralia bent his black eyebrows and fingered impatiently with his plaited frills.

What! Mary Aldour sent about, and that white-faced, soft, little Lowland Miss Macdonald taken to tremble at the wilderness, if she did not shriek at the rugged rocks. Mary Aldour to be made a convenience of, and dismissed from her position for a plaguey brat of a boy ; and there might not be such another day that summer—that summer? that lifetime in those changeable latitudes, where the lines read pat, not occasionally but habitually,

I've seen the morning with gold the hills adorning,
And loud tempests raging before parting day ;

and Mary Aldour to lose the opportunity and the weather, which became it, for that spoiled little lamester ! If Mary had known it, Finralia fretted horribly on her account. It was no business of Finralia's, but he was bitterly indignant.

The merest fortuitous circumstance set Mary free, and permitted her to resume her original intention. When they had travelled half a mile—Mary already at the pony's head, down the glen, they met Mr. Cormac Macgregor, the denizen of Glen Aldour who had returned to lay his bones in its recesses, striding along, swinging his ashen stick, in order to deliver a message from the world without, which he had received by the last week's post for Mr. Macdonnel of the Schoolhouse; who had brothers abroad, and on the high seas. Capricious Niel was very fond of the old man, whom Malcolm secretly regarded as the bane of his young life ; and Macgregor, in his faded

tartan coat and fringed trews, which Mary could never induce him to let into the hands of old Sheelas—as good as an experienced tailor, to be put right and the whole set in walking trim, presented a sympathetic attraction to the boy. He was as fanciful and more testy than Niel himself ; there was a clear bond of union between disappointed age and what was already showing itself disappointed youth. Niel fed with appetite on the retired man of the world's experiences ; and the boy also loved to visit the Schoolhouse, where his sore sense of the inferiority of his shrunk limb and puny body was consoled by his pre-eminency in learning over the bare-legged gillies, the shock-headed, profoundly ignorant young clansmen, where he could find a field to patronize in his turn, as his brothers presided over manly games and sports. Accordingly, Niel announced his will to desert the party bound for Ben Falloch, and diverge with Mr. Cormac Macgregor, supremely indifferent to returning safe to his mother's side—a comfortable end on which, however, the rest of the party could depend, as Mr. Cormac's presence of mind and precision in need kept pace with his grumbling propensities and powers—and he affected the lame, clever lad Niel as much as he professed to condemn and despise the stout, stupid boy Malcolm.

'Mary Aldour, I greet you with the lowliest salutation an old man is at liberty to address to his star ; but, madam, that was a two weeks' old Mercury which you despatched by Malcolm this morning, unless in-

deed it was the other unlucky Mercury wool-gathering as usual.'

'No, Mr. Cormac, it was the goddess, whose eyes deceived her like any mortal's,' answered Mary, laughing, as she resigned her place by Robin's bridle and mingled with her companions, blithe and zealous in the attempt on Ben Falloch, as if she had never for one moment given it up.

Aldour was in his element in the periodical excursions to his mountain, and although flustered and out of sorts to-day, he soon rose into much of his humour on the occasion. He walked first, prepared to act as pioneer, a good many paces in advance of his band. In his character he had borrowed a shepherd's stick, and in spite of the efforts of the younger men present and the bashful remonstrances of Sandy and Shane, the basket of provisions was slung on his back, and as many of the plaids for the women as he could capture, over his arm. And there could hardly be a more enlivening, invigorating sight than Aldour footing it so gaily and gallantly, and turning round every now and then, displaying the hale red on his ample cheek, and urging his comrades to speed and steadiness.

Mary was right again. There could have been few things more imprudent in the way of an essay at dubious company than inviting Finralia to climb Ben Falloch by their side. It was not only an insult to the Macdonnels' venerable old mountain, but it was furnishing a wide opening to the most pernicious ease and prolonged communion. Finralia might have been invited to scores of suppers, and even to dozens of

haymakings and dances like that of Croclune, and an equal number of merry-makings at Christmas, without the same apology for freedom and fellowship.

John Dunglas paired off with Anne Macdonald, and a very pretty sight it was to see them breasting difficulties and hailing refreshments together, Dunglas's figure tall enough to tower over Anne's slender shape, Dunglas's bonnet bending most perseveringly and affectionately on a level with Anne's hat ; a very pretty allegory of their future career, when this other 'Lucy,'

fearless of the slippery way,
While safe she trips the heathy brae,
Shall hang on Arthur's arm.

But the lads, Malcolm and the tacksmen's sons, were all barefooted like the young gillies, and their lithe feet so case-hardened, that it was true they could, like Raarsa's son, have walked ten miles over flinty rocks, so hardy was their training. No wonder that the 'Black Watch' officers and men were paladins among their peers of the British host ; they could scramble up dizzy heights, they could endure the most trying exposure as successfully and harmlessly as any Zouave, and with much the same grim glee in the operation. Now they scattered like wild geese to scale different and difficult introductory points—not husbanding their strength like wiser and older people for the great encounter ; and the gillies were left hanging respectfully on the rear. Mary was committed to Finralia ; Mary was compelled to walk by Finralia ; but Mary was a philosopher, and strove not only to comport herself with equanimity in difficult circum-

to pour it forth in idle words and idler laughter, but walked beside Finralia with her bright hair blowing about with a pleasant sensation of freedom, and the loveliest bloom on her cheek, very still in speech and gesture.

Along a rugged, dismal peat track over a moor, up the first swells and swells of the ascent, ferns yielding to juniper, juniper giving way to crowberry, the air keener and keener, chests beginning to heave and steps to falter, till Aldour proclaims a timely interval of repose, and a bite and sup to those who are neither hunters nor shepherds. A ready, unceremonious ring, with Mary in the centre and Finralia like a groom at her feet, his position no more regarded by her than that of his otter hound, and John Dunglas and Anne Macdonald still side by side, and Aldour, the father of his people, serving the two gillies, his ‘gillies of the body,’ with the largest *whangs* of the barley bread, the fullest quaichs of the golden water, and the boys, boy-like, tittering and chattering and pulling up the hard, trailing, branched tangles of the foxtail, more fitly named staghorn, and seeking fungi to serve as matches to light the pipes, for which the Highlanders had already acquired a passion, (not the Red Indians are greater slaves to the fire-water than the Highlanders were at this time to tobacco ; Mary buys it constantly for great treats to her old men, and alleges seriously that by varying the quality of this spell she can wind every man of the clan round her finger, from Aldour

and Mr. Cormac Macgregor to silly Hamish and little Ian,) and chasing the nearest goats and sheep, and starting the heather hens, when they ought to be eating with all their might, or stretching themselves with closed eyes, reclined head, and, if possible, bated breath, getting the advantage of the halt.

A right homely repast, no luxurious banquet of cates, but the mountain fare, hard-boiled eggs, thin cakes and bannocks, goat milk cheese, ham, butter, and honey, the little kit of cream with the ladle chained to it, in addition to the brandy and whisky. Perhaps, in spite of Mary's assertion in favour of strong drink, the cream was the best auxiliary there. Spread such a feast among the grey rocks and the red ling, and cluster around it, at due distances, lairds and ladies, lads and gillies, and see if quietness will not in a degree vanish and dislikes be placed in abeyance.

Up again, and, strengthened and stimulated, strive for the cairn on the summit. Was there ever a mountain excursion where some of the party were not bitten with the fancy of distancing the others, and fought like Trojans for the priority, as if it involved a poor laurel wreath, until they either dropped down on the way, grovelling dead beaten, or waved caps and handkerchiefs in a short spasm of hysterick exultation from their bastion? Aldour was out of the game ; after putting the company on the slope which skirting tomhans, and fragments of debris and grass-green patches of moss, would lead them to the height of their ambition, he was induced to linger to receive an

account of an outlying flock from a skilful shepherd ; it was not like Aldour to be indifferent to glory, but in spite of his exertions he was behind himself to-day, not up to his mark of mingled phlegm and cheerfulness. Aldour was not demonstrative at any time, but somehow, this afternoon, he seemed as if he contended with an oppressive dream. The rest of the party started for the prize, and as in the case of most races it soon became evident who would be the winners. But in the first place they fell into the long string of the regular pilgrims and combatants, even the boys complied with the natural order.

As Ben Falloch was a miniature edition of Mont Blanc, suppose the party a cabinet version of the travellers toiling round the Grands Mulets. It was toil to these feminine bones and muscles, and even to the men's vigour on this humble, private Scotch mountain, stumbling, tottering, striving up without an idea of fame or a shout of *Excelsior*, ankle deep in the heather where more adders might lurk—the worst part of the journey, the sweat drops gathering on the smooth brows, the chests tightening and aching, the breath sobbing. Never think, my friends, of looking round on the brown and purple wilderness and down at Aldour, already a hollow at your feet, bend forwards and keep labouring upwards, or you may sink down right before your neighbour, and he will perhaps be too busy and too callous with the hardness of concentrated powers and the growing dulness of exhaustion to pick you up.

Ah ! a dip and a slip into a treacherous slough, and one of the boys, fit to whimper like the dogs from sheer spent afflatus, falls and has to be raised again, and the others at various angles do halt and look at each other with dimmed eyes and queerly pulled mouths. Why, they are only at the Roebuck Spring ! And yonder towers the big Ben above them, as if cruelly chuckling at their discomfiture, and as far as they can judge not one inch nearer them than when they set off. Is the old Ben a wizard ? They almost think him ugly this afternoon, which after the morning's liquid ether has settled down into a kind of clear cloudiness, far apart from rain, and far above the invulnerable, immovable head of the Ben. Is he really bewitching them not a whit more than he has done every rover who has ever ventured to traverse his rutted and tossed surface ? And has he no clan weakness for the Macdonnels of Aldour ?

They gather round the spring now more like a caravan in an Arabian desert than tourists doing Switzerland. At a certain elevation every well is tasted by the cunning of the explorers ; even the hunter catches the drops in his hands, and sends them down his parched throat or over his throbbing brow ; it is the nectar which may brace the most relaxed nerves, and restore the most failing stamina, and send the individual pondering, if he has still strength to ponder, ruefully and sceptically of Malcolm Græme, who could mount

Without a sob Benledi's side,

and young Col, who could run out a greyhound, jaded but whole, to the mountain-top. These crystal, ice-cold, green-fringed wells—city fountains are no nearer to them than city lamps to the stars in the sky—but when we cannot get the stars we admit thankfully that we are very glad of the lamps.

'I am but a little sick,' grants Anne Macdonald tremulously, in response to the close examination of young Dunglas. 'I knew I would feel faint, Mary warned me of it, and I said I would bear it. It is nothing, I dare say. Pray, sir, don't mention it and create a disturbance on my account; I would not like to be weaker than I can help, and the others have enough to do with themselves.'

Oh! Anne, flattering a young man by a secret between him and you; making his hot blood tingle with the first gentle confidence, having him urge on you a stealthy application to his hunting flask—and you fain to comply with the unbecoming request. Dunglas so proud to succour you, and you so incapable of refusing any stay. This comes of climbing mountains. Oh! temperance advocates, you may stand aghast. Oh! Anne's old-fashioned, precise, fine-mannered friends in the Edinburgh and Glasgow of the day, if you could have detected your favourite secretly sipping from the hunting flask of a gay Highland Laird—a northern spark of the first water, how shrilly you would have exclaimed, how you would have determined to spirit back the deluded Anne to the South instantly. Yet, no, we beg your pardon; with all your dignity and

formality there was associated with these qualities a genial heartiness, a spirited candour fit to cope with such an emergency. But this comes of climbing mountains ; who knows what mountains may bring them to ?

Among the heather were now strewn boulders and splinters of stone enough to form a hundred foxearths ; and the bones of the sheep, lost in the snow or perished of disease, were scattered so thickly and picked so clean, that the foxes or the hooded crows and ravens, or an eagle, sweeping down in majesty and dispersing a meaner host, must have had mighty banquets there. Mary called back it was the bones of old campaigners, who, like the champions in the Arabian Nights' tale, had aspired to Ben Falloch in vain, and now covered the greedy mountain-side. The sheep themselves, white with the whiteness of high latitudes, and the bold, merry, or superhumanly sagacious goats, black and white like Paul Potter's cattle, or brown with cream-coloured flakes and streaks, and patriarchal beards, no longer ran and leaped to avoid the strangers, but stood still and contemplated them with a peaceful, or impertinent curiosity, that actually gave the most lonesome sensation of all that struck them around. It chilled Anne ; John Dunglas protested it was not canny ; but Mary started forward with renewed delight, and would have liked to have patted the heads and pulled the beards of the denizens of the desert.

'Hush,' exclaims the foremost pilgrim, as if they

had been sounding a bruit, and stands stock still, though in the utmost excitement. What ails him ? What has happened ? High overhead, above a serrated ridge where only hinds' feet could tread, is reared first one noble pair of antlers and then another and another, till the breeze bears the scent on its wings, and with a simultaneous toss of the fine heads, and a harmonious ringing of hoofs light as music in the upper air, the vision has vanished and the drove of deer is far in the distance.

The little rills commenced to make chequerwork of the mountain-side, and to add the impediment of their wet pebbly channels to their course. The little drop caused the full cup to overflow. Anne Macdonald could advance no further. She confessed it reluctantly, and every one looking at the delicate town-bred girl and detecting the ague of excessive effort and excessive fatigue, saw the plain truth of the statement, and did not venture to dispute it. Nay, Anne found enough support—the boys were willing to stay with her and comfort her, only quarrelling, with their remaining breath, as to who had first given in, and who would have soonest attained the summit if they had adhered to the beaten path in the commencement of the expedition. Anne would have none of them, unless indeed, those who had failed next to herself. She was mortified and sorrowful, and Mary was cruel enough to laugh at her, and Dunglas would despise her ; no, he looked angry ; he was certainly vexed, as he stood there pushing

aside his hair and considering, but the sum of his reverie was the announcement, half-shy, half-brusque, that he would remain behind also. Where was the use of continuing to advance ? they were not deer-stalking ; he had often been on Ben Falloch before ; he did not care for the view ; and he flung himself down on the heather, as an inert target against whose recumbent substance all accusations of sloth and laziness, all taunts of being vanquished, all essays to pique him to further progress, were harmless shafts which would glance aside without the least effect.

Anne remonstrated, entreated, if she had been bold enough would have commanded, with the tears in her eyes, her special guide to get up and go on without her. But the tears were not altogether sorrowful ; Dunglas had been so kind to her ; Dunglas was so good to waive that splendid attainment—the crown of Ben Falloch, and the prospect of which they all talked so much, and said it was quite worth a man's losing a pound of flesh, like the merchant of Venice, every summer in his life, to contemplate, and all to cloak her feebleness by bearing it company with his manliness. Dunglas was held the next best sportsman to Finralia in a string of counties. But love is sweeter than ambition ; with all honour to the mountains, and the craving to surmount them, most women would have been willing to have been so conquered —conquering even where she was conquered.

Finralia and Mary and the gillies were left to

prevent their plan becoming a complete failure, and the entire party direly disgraced ; and Mary was so carried away by the potency of the mountains, that it never entered her head to find this a reason for declining the goal, and being finally defeated in the great accomplishment of the brave Highland lads and lasses ; she went on as if they had still been a united and numerous company. As yet she had journeyed without much conversation with her partner, and without affording him a chance of lending her assistance—Mary could hold up her head and keep her feet and gain ground when nine out of ten were dizzy and sliding backwards. At last Mary broke out with a little laugh, glancing at the gillies hanging behind them, ‘ We are like a forlorn hope in the war with the French in America ; the remaining members of the detachment have fallen out of the ranks or are shot down, and we are left alone to uphold the honour of the mountains.’

‘ I am too proud of the association, madam,’ said Finralia, gravely.

A little afterwards Mary knew she had done enough all unaided. ‘ Now, Finralia,’ she decided with simplicity, ‘ I will take your hand.’

It was stretched out instantly ; but not without the remark, or retort, ‘ It was not sought, Miss Macdonnel, until it was indispensable.’

‘ No,’ Mary responded composedly, ‘ it was not. I will help myself as long as I can ; and then, when I can hold out no longer, I will submit to the exi-

gencies of my sex, and ask any man to afford me the use of his right hand.'

'And imagine that it was absolutely requisite, madam, and that any man—the most abject, outcast man—refused with a scowl or an imprecation what had been so long slighted—what was slighted still.'

Mary started; but she had heard that Finralia, without reputation and with evil precedents, was an austere, ironical fellow. 'Then I would trust in God, Finralia.'

The momentary sense of check and displeasure gave way before the last difficulties and the nearness of their end. Like the breath of another region, the wind now whistled keen and shrill; right overhead loomed the Ben at bay. A little more labour, another ten minutes' strain and anguish, and they would be on the crest, with their foot verily on their foe; when, suddenly, within ten minutes, within five, the long heather warping round and tripping their weary, wading steps, yielded to short green turf—the precipice seemed to resolve itself into a gentle inclination, and the conclusion was as easy and joyous as the starting, yet as far removed from it as the boys' dreams from their realization. The surprise was just what was needed to complete the radiance of success.

Mary hurried forward, forgetting that she was grasping Finralia's hand, ignorant of what cause had flushed his cheek more deeply than exercise, and she

stood on the summit and she looked around her. ‘Oh! thank God,’ cried Mary, not lightly, but very reverently, not for the effort accomplished and the feat performed, but like Linnæus for his bush of broom—for that wondrous sight, that ineffable sensation of the world at her feet, that feeling as if she could mount and fly. The great, good Doctor was unable to reach it; never looked on the sea of mountains from north to south, from east to west, wellnigh from shore to shore—the great sea billows of the north countrie; never traced the rivers as silver threads, and counted the lochs as jewels strung on them; never measured the snow, on this August day, in the rifts of Braemar, and the furrows of Glencoe; and, near at hand, from cone to base, looked down on the lesser hills—sugar-loaves, horse-shoes, finger-points magnified into immensity, and dyed in a livery, not of purple or blue, like their giant brethren a hundred miles away, but of the clearest pearly grey, tinged and stained with the loveliest faint green. Oh, for bridal suits of the hues of the mountains, the purple bloom, the dim, dreamy blue, and that which mercers and mantua-makers call French grey and sea-green! Oh, for painters’ brushes dipped deep, deep in those tints for immortality. But only good-natured, commonplace, fussy Bozzy spied the sight on that never-to-be-forgotten journey.

Finralia had his own thoughts on the mountain-top alone with Mary Aldour—how they two seemed.

allied—how dwindled away the solid, teeming obstacles that severed them—gloomy Finralia and bright Glen Aldour of which she was so full, mere specks in the eye and atoms in the creation, and their precedents, so broad and distinct heretofore, diminished until they were all but invisible. Is it a dangerous doctrine, that which Paul preached on the Hill of Mars, that God has made of one flesh all mankind—Jew and Gentile, Greek and Barbarian? And the lesson which the Master taught of the hale and prosperous Samaritan who counted himself born brother to the robbed and wounded Jew? How much does the parable mean? Has it its limits? The tenderness and the charity, the kind hand, the loan of the ass, the two-pence—do they stop short of the full recognition of common brotherhood, the free forgiveness of past offences, the open-armed restoration to intimate friendship and household love? Surely there is a demarcation. ‘Son,’ says the prodigal’s father, remonstrating with the envious elder brother, ‘thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.’ Worldly possessions—perhaps heavenly rank—credit and renown, ease and independence, self-respect and self-satisfaction, are for the Arthurs, not the Lancelots. Yet here, too, there must be exceptions. Is not the love of a brother, is not the love of a woman, among them?

What if Roderick Finralia and Mary Aldour lost their way on their descent, missed their companions, and wandered nights and days in the wilds? What

if they had lived a century agone when such an accident would have been quite practicable and possible ? Would they have turned to each other, the single man and woman ; would they have grown in a few days—miraculous growth—out of remembrance even of a thousand strong discrepancies, and met each other and melted into twin souls ?

Poor Finralia was roughly disabused of his chimera, and felt the present day garish, glaring, and altogether offensive and insurmountable when the gillies appeared right on their rear, and good Aldour himself striding along manfully to regain their society, and assert his dignity as their leader, and his character as an athletic Highlander over sixty, without a twinge of rheumatism, though he had lain out many a rainy summer night watching a wild cat's den, and been at his post in the starry darkness of many a frosty winter morning to shoot wild swan, and capercailzie, and Norwegian ducks. Yet Aldour was bland, more at ease than he had seemed throughout the whole course of the afternoon, joking Mary and Finralia on their triumph over their neighbours. ‘Finralia, honest man, you have done well ; Molly, you've won your wager. Did I not hear you bode a pair of gloves with John Dunglas that you would be the first on the top of Ben Falloch ? and he and Anne have broken down not fifty yards beyond the Roebuck Spring, shame to them ! And the colt Malcolm, and his playfellows ; I must have them better bred.’

Since there was no sunset to wait for, because Ben

Falloch, after all the boast of the fine weather, had, according to a common custom—indeed a practice which he made a point of adopting three hundred out of the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year, that of sulking himself to sleep, was now threatening not only to put on, but to draw down his sombre nightcap, it became the most prudent as well as the most pleasant proceeding to wish him good evening summarily, however reluctant to have lost the gain that had been won, however hard to have reached the throne and not be permitted to sit fairly down on it. It was a simple enough matter while daylight lasted to reverse their difficult ascent, as many an urchin has found, almost too graphically, perched on the apex of a greasy pole, a tapering mast, a rough tree branch. In a few minutes they would be back at the Roebuck Spring, picking up their partners, covered with confusion, yet putting a good face on their disgrace, and wonderfully comforted and refreshed. In a few minutes more they would be down among the ferns and blackthorn, and in not above two hours altogether they would be descrying the horn of the moon escaping from those malicious clouds, and looking shyly into its mirror Loch Aldour, as they entered the honeysuckle porch not too tired for the hot supper, the punch-bowl, the songs and jests, though too fagged for the pipes and the carpet dance—all the usual social, but stereotyped and somewhat arrogant life of the glens, with which John Dunglas had so much in common and Finralia so little. Finralia would not join in it; he decidedly refused the so-

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licitations which Aldour, still bent on a crazed extent of hospitality, tendered him, took leave of the party, and bending his head to the rising blast, followed another gully to Finralia, pursuing his solitary, barren way, while they travelled together to their genial gossip and good fellowship at Aldour. Nobody at Aldour, unless in an excess of generosity, missed him, nobody almost, however indignant, recorded the data that he had been their companion to Ben Falloch, that he had stood together with Mary Aldour on its summit, while he still dwelt on the fact persistently in his strolls, and his seats, and even in the midst of his business in Inverluig after many days, excusing himself for thinking of the circumstance because of its strangeness—that he, of all men, though she had defied him, had stood alone on the mountain-top with Mary Aldour.





CHAPTER VII.

'LAST MAY A BRAW WOOER CAME DOWN THE LONG
GLEN.'

WHOLE books have been written on such a pleasant theme, surely it may suffice for one chapter. Such poems as 'Miles Standish,' such idyls as the 'Angel in the House,' have not put the subject out of fashion, have they? And this was such a pleasant wooing, such a pretty wooing, the pair were so well matched, all parties were so well pleased, the scene was so well suited to the act. It is all very well to say that such minor matters are of no consequence, or actually by their hostility set off the harmony of the performers, the exquisite blended pathos and humour of the old, old duet. That may be—once in a while, and to the principals, but we are only the subordinates, and we like all agreeable, becoming adjuncts; we like what was called a pretty couple—a strapping, 'yellow-haired laddie,' like John Dunglas, a gentle lass, like Anne Macdonald, though we do respect the earnestness and depth of feeling and purpose with which our grandfathers and grandmothers frequently dispensed with

mere accessories. Disparities of age and standing in the simple deed of matrimony were by no means more common among the ancients than the moderns, but remarkable discrepancies in unions founded and finished in true love strike us and challenge our wonder and applause. The gently-bred fugitive in the Rebellion weds the low-born lass who succours him heroically in his peril, and they live happily ever afterwards. The wounded and imprisoned soldier finds himself free and hearty again, allies himself, without a scruple, to the alien daughter of his enemy, foreign in every habit and taste, and they are the most constant and sympathetic of companions. Richard Lovell Edgeworth marries for his third wife the lady whose two-year old vanity about her pink sash he pointed out to his second wife, and the Goody Twoshoes is the veritable angel of his house and heart. Mary Russell Mitford hears how her grandfather, the stately church dignitary, was equally blest. Earl James of Crawford, at sixty, all but dies for a girl of eighteen, thinks better of it, recovers to become her husband, and they are models of domestic bliss. Was James Melville, the Presbyterian divine, right when he argued hotly that he was not old, only elderly, at fifty? Was their age such a green old age? Has sentiment grown mawkish and morbid? Still, we like a strapping lad and a gentle lass, locks luxuriant like John Dunglas's, cheeks round, though pale, like Anne Macdonald's; a strong dash of boyish folly in his pursuit, a deep tinge of girlish coyness in her

retreat. We submit they may not be truer, not half so true in their nonage, but they are prettier, and we have a lurking love for pretty things—real pretty things, not mock ones—from the ripple of Shenstone's

My banks they are furnished with bees,
My hills are white over with sheep,

to the bright colours of chintz ; and if none else loved pretty things, so did wild Dick Steele and gracious Joseph Addison.

Again, it is all very well to pretend that true love wants opposition to bring out its sincerity and enhance its disinterestedness, and it may be, and no doubt is, very stimulating to fight a battle about anything ; but we have a tolerably certain conviction that it is not true love, but very false love, which imperatively wants pepper and vinegar to give it a relish. Beware ! oh young ladies, of such an argument. War has its greatness, its fathoming rods, and its touchstones, but many who were not Quakers thought Tennyson a little mad for the moment, in company with his lover, when he expressed a preference for its cruel horrors over the basenesses of peace.

The author of Tom Brown, who has taught us to be a little shy of the heathen aphorism of young men sowing their wild oats, could also in his manly way expose the fallacy of true love originating and culminating in wilfulness.

We maintain it was far prettier to see how everybody was full of good humour, good will, friendly

congratulation, and foolish fun. It was pretty to hear Aldour's slow laughter ; it was pretty to see Mrs. Macdonnel's quiet matronly smile ; it was pretty to listen to the children's shrewd conjectures and bold predictions ; it was pretty, although a little of a rude affair, to witness the servants' nudgings and sniggerings and their Gaelic jokes, quite safe before Anne, but of course very dangerous within earshot of John Dunglas. And it was exceedingly pretty to perceive Mary's pretty womanly treatment of the business ; how she half patronized, half ignored it ; how, in a fit of delicate propriety, she screened it from notice the one moment, and in a fit of hardy mischief exposed it to observation the next ; and how she always fled like a deer from being in the most distant way a spy on the courtship—and such a tide of blood rushed into Mary's carnation cheeks, and such a frenzy of confusion overcame her, as calm, mild Anne never experienced, in her modesty, on her own account, when Mary could not avoid seeing Dunglas touch Anne's hand, and was penned into a corner, and compelled, unless she had affronted them by publicly interrupting the process, to overhear the last whisper at parting. The whole experience so filled Dunglas with gladness that, although it has been hinted that with all his pleasant qualities he had a sensitive man's consciousness and a Highland Laird's consequentiality, he prolonged the period of the ordeal when he rode, and walked, and sauntered, and hastened a bridegroom to Glen Aldour.

As the third element in the charm of John Dunglas's wooing comes in the locality of the glen, the picturesque, primitive glen of Aldour. A man may conquer circumstances—he may defy the sands of the North and the swamps of the South, the peas in the shoes, and the needles and pins in the gloves of a formal drawing-room in a formal house, in a formal street, in a formal town, or the poisoned lance-heads and arrows launched at his head and heart from behind the palm or mangoe grove of a South-Sea island, and he may be justly proud of his constancy; but unless he goes the length of adopting the doctrines of the cynics, and preferring pain to pleasure, he ought to be thankful for a Glen Aldour—he ought to welcome a Glen Aldour, retired, yet populous, full of the quietest nooks, yet abounding in the most friendly faces, and affording a fresh, and fair, and fragrant green stage to the canticle and epithalamium of his life. The world cannot have lost all sense of the sweetness of a pastoral while it retains its liveliest appreciation of the worth of a farce. Think how much better off John Dunglas was than his brother in a city, or even on a prosaic low country estate, where men only hunt from October to March, and shoot in September, and the most romantic path is no more than ‘by yon burnside,’ and ‘coming through the rye,’ or rather the fat wheat. Yes, the author of the ‘Virginians’ places even the stupid lovable lad and the lying, pitiful woman at the crisis of their romance in the twilight or the moonlight of the

castle garden. Pity the sorrows of the poor town men wooing to the light of the sun through the dusty plants on a balcony, or the smoky gleam of lamps dropping oil or disseminating the fumes of gas in that most artificial of gardens, a conservatory. Yes, that is the favourite spot and moment. Our magazines abound with sketches by pen and pencil, of young ladies in lace, or tarletane, with very full skirts and very large bouquets, and everything else about them singularly small, taking refuge behind withering heaths and myrtles and Cape jessamines, at the instigation of young men in dress coats and varieties of ties, but orthodox white gloves, and invariable camellias at button-holes (better still, when they were in regimentals, but fashion has malignantly dictated that uniform shall only be worn in the fullest of full-dress ; and after all, dear ! to think that a man's heart was necessarily more tender and true because he had slain a Russian, or chased a bushman, or shot a Sepoy—all very creditable performances in their own way—or what was far more probable, only lounged from barrack to barrack, and acquired not the strong smoke of cannon-balls, but the lucifer-match odour of reviews), and the musical accompaniments were somebody's brass band, and the languid beating of aristocratic toes, and the interruption was the announcement of one of Gunter's suppers. The writers assure us that such special interludes are full of fascination. Ah, well ! we do remember that little Fanny Price creeping upstairs to the last echo

of the violins at Mansfield Park, foot-sore, jaded, and giddy, followed by the fumes of the negus and the white soup, did still settle in her somewhat worried but well-balanced youthful brain, that a ball, a first ball, was a very delightful thing. But cite an honest country man and woman, green from sobriety and earnestness, and they will unite in telling you that he and she don't want the glamour and fascination, they want the dignity of manly simplicity and the freshness of wholesome, steady, lasting warmth—the warmth that will endure the cooling from many a cross and flaw during two long lives—more chivalrous, peradventure, than to leap up and blaze out to death in one moment for its object; and if possible, they would have old earth in its perennial youth and beauty at their back—the faint reflection of the Paradise in which Eve, flying from her shadow, found Adam—the very earth which brought forth briars and thorns under the curse, but which shall yet under the blessing blossom like the rose. Rather a knot of dewy primroses, though gathered with chilled fingers and soiled with earthstains, than a bunch of artificial flowers of dazzling pink cambric, glittering with drops of perennial gum, though held easily and unfadingly in the warmest and balmiest clasp. Our life must be the life of the dusty or muddy, drenched or scorched denizen of the hedgerow. We can never, not even the waiting-women and Frenchwomen, and beaux and bucks among us, compete with the cambric, and starch, and gum, half its life in a bandbox

and half in a ball-room, till it at lasts descends to 'high life below stairs,' down, down, till it is flung out one fine morning on the dust-heap, when its pale sister under the sun and moon strikes out new suckers and swells with next spring's buds.

Better the keen frost and white rime of the pond at Newliston, where gentle Fraser Tytler—like Wilson of Woodville, one of the Sir Galahads of literature—decided on learning his fate; they bore mellow fruit when he showed his little motherless children the portrait of the sweet, God-fearing woman who had been his wife and their mother, and tried fondly to impress them with the idea of her, not ghastly in death, but bending to them, for the last time, the shadow of her benign self from her sick bed, and dividing among them the velvet auricula, the scarce spring flowers, which she held in her wasted hands. Better the frost and the rime, purer than sculptor's art, than the gleam of gas lustres and the touch of chalked floors.

But there is a large proportion of the population of cities who are not even so happy as to claim conservatories and balconies, who must court on the horse-hair chairs and sofas of dining-room and back-parlour, and to the thrum of sister Sally's music-lesson, if they do not invite the fair lady to a botanical garden and trust again to the charitable melody of a military brass band, allowed by the favour of a gracious commanding officer to play on the crowded promenade once a fortnight. Ah me! we are right glad that true love, like the moon, is everywhere overhead.

Credit only how fortunate John Dunglas was in his wooing in Glen Aldour before summer had fully ripened into autumn, when farther glory was yet in prospect ; the patches of oats among the rocks and the moors to become golden instead of the blue flower of the flax and the purple bloom of the potatoes, the red ling to replace the bell-heather, the rowan berries to show scarlet, and the leaves of the wild cherries to replace the oak-shoots of July in their crimson streaks and strains ; on these long summer days, and in these long summer gloamings, finding a hundred apposite employments, all tinged with the languid, dreamy joy of the pursuit. Love-making and active sport could not go hand in hand, but there were gatherings of elderberries and birch twigs for wine, pluckings of water-lilies from a mere prodigal desire after their beauty, long excursions in company with Mary on her multifarious errands, when their presence was not demanded for the conclusion of the expedition. When Mary went in alone to see the sick child, or inquire for the absent husband, or invite the well-grown daughter to the House for lessons in baking or darning, and John Dunglas and Anne Macdonald sat without by the invariable singing stream, under the ash, or the fir, or the beetling rock, and never wearied, however long they tarried waiting, weaving as they were fancies airier and more transparent than gossamer, and Mary would come out accompanied by a comely goodwife in her pure linen curch passed across her brow, and the ends hanging loose behind, or a cheery

carline who wore the bands of the matron's head-dress tied comfortably under her chin, who would be uttering the usual, 'A blessing go with your father's daughter, Mary Aldour,' and while she was slightly piqued that the white-faced Lowland girl, a mere snow-drop, by your leave, should win John Dunglas, while their rose, Mary Aldour, was still in the market, would say cordially and meaningly, 'A good foot go with yourself, young Dunglas; I hope you heard the cuckoo this noon, Miss Anne Macdonald, after you were safe to have broken your fast. The children heard 's note when they were coming from the moss; he must be the last of the season.' Or when even Mary was idle and they all resorted to their 'Dorchthalla,' or dark den, their 'Glach an duich,' or dusky hollow, their 'Culachy waterfall,' and Drimen Duie. About her waterfall particularly Mary was almost as monomaniacal as the old Skye chief, Rorie of Dunvegan, who had his bedchamber within sound of his cascade because it disposed him to rest, and above the bed the wistful inscription, 'Sir Rorie Macleod of Dunvegan, Knight, God send good rest.' She insisted that if she were very ill and tossed with fever, if they would but carry her within the lulling coolness of the plash of her linn, since it was too remote to reach the House, she would sink into the balmiest, most blest repose, with the addition of dreaming charming dreams. She was enthusiastic as Mrs. Grant about her 'Drimen Duie,' her eminence worn into a sharp angle by the Aldour water which coursed round it, its summit

covered with tender grass, clover flowers, and eye-bright, but partially shaded by one tuft of feathered larches, and its side a thicket of blackthorn, vine-like brambles, briony-like wild roses, dark, stiff holly bushes, and spreading oak coppice, hanging down into the clear brown water. There they dallied amidst a full chorus of those singing-birds which the Doctor missed —blackbirds, thrushes, finches. Yes, Glen Aldour was a great glen for singing-birds ; the robin redbreast whistled there far through the winter, the cushat dove crooded the summer long. They made believe to work at mending John Dunglas's fishing-net, or his traps and pouches for game and vermin, but in reality they only talked and laughed, discoursed sentiment and philosophy of a crude enough description, poor things ! and sang 'Chro-Challin' and suchlike simple ditties ; and how their Fall and their Hillock remained in after years steeped in memories so strangely sweet in their sadness, that none of them could have borne to lose them. Above all, they boated at all hours and seasons. Anne had long ago lost her timorousness on the water, and liked nothing so much as to be sculled into the little bays, and pulled across the reaches, and taught how to handle a rod and cast a line, though she did not lose at this time a commiseration for the gasping trout. She learnt also how to sing the boat song in time to the oar, or to sit quite silent, looking up intently at 'the queen and huntress chaste and fair,' or watching her reflection low down in the quivering water. Vows the Highland lover—

I'll skim the loch with canty glee,
 Rest the oar to pleasure thee ;
 When chilly breezes sweep the tide,
 I'll row thee in my Highland plaid.

Anne knew every phase of the poetic Highland courtship ; it was written indelibly on her heart, at once tender and constant. But mind, there were disadvantages in this pretty wooing ; its pleasantness threatened to be the dearth of its fulfilment. John Dunglas dangled, and loitered, and played with his happiness and that of another, in disregard of a wise, sharp adage that propounds in curt lines,

Happy's the wooing
 That's not long a-doing.

Partly because there was no reason in the world for delay—his father and Aldour were acquiescent and even thankful, and Anne's south country relations would be in a more deliberate and sober way satisfied with the match for her—partly because it was so agreeable to make it up, John Dunglas did not hurry to his goal. And as he toyed and teased himself and her now and then for variety, and sang, and stood, and sat on his road, a kind of stagnancy stole over the courtship—a sort of becalmed atmosphere which rendered Mary at times impatient, and which, even in its luxury, would occasionally weary John Dunglas—pall upon him, as it were. He was repentant enough afterwards, but he had his fits and starts of carelessness, remissness, and the shadow of neglect ; and then

he would return to Croclune and prove that, however relaxed, the toils of the Robertsons still existed for him. He had moments of bad taste when he could willingly exchange the elegance of Anne Macdonald for the boisterousness of Nancy Robertson ; hours when he could supersede the sensible, intelligent, modest animation of Aldour for the rackets and the licence of Croclune. And ‘ Ah ! it is well he is Anne’s beau, not mine,’ repeated Mary Aldour ; and ah ! Mary, you are continuing in your ignorance of human nature to argue on mistaken premises.

It is not impossible that Anne, however innocently, had a share in the small error, ‘ the little rift within the lute.’ Anne was very much attached to John Dunglas, and she was a very gentle girl ; and strange to say, from these two causes combined she was destitute of any of the vehemence which might have flattened his vanity and inflamed his passion. To what authority can an author of a domestic story go like our gifted sister Jane Austin ? Are not her Dutch paintings on ‘ the square inches of ivory,’ choice repertoires of homely but subtle truth ? And there you will find Jane Bennet’s calm, retiring manners, the very perfection and delicacy of her mild, modest, but affectionate temper, allowed as an excuse for Bingley’s tameness in being persuaded to leave her on the plea of incurring undesirable connexions.

A very clever, very learned, very witty author has

lately brought up on the same ground of discussion—whether a good, meek woman does not often miss the man whom she loves and would marry by her undemonstrativeness, her reluctance to anticipate his overtures, her desire to preserve the secret bloom of her tenderness—all that is loveliest in a female character; and how not unfrequently a coarser, hardier, perhaps more indifferent woman steps in, proffers the decisive evidence, and carries off with a *coup de main* the wavering judge—sometimes to his degradation and misery. It is not a testimony to the penetration and the resolution of suitors which is thus jointly vouchsafed by an observant, meditative woman and an argumentative man, yet it rests on facts. John Dunglas was just the man to lead in appearance, and in reality to be misguided—to be powerfully affected by the comparative presence or absence of a show of hands in his favour. Good for Anne if she could have fainted, or screamed in hysterics, or even cried a little softly, and in an upright position, at the proper moment. In the days when Richardson's novels were in the ascendant, and Mrs. Montague and Dr. Gregory lectured to submissive listeners—one sees that such effusions were absolutely necessary, and indeed the starch of the barriers produced the revulsion and often answered the opposite purpose to that for which they were intended—women could not contain themselves within such prim limits, and broke forth saucily or simply every now and then. But as Anne was not completely under Mrs. Montague and Dr.

Gregory, so neither had she the happy, melting moods of 'Harriet Byron,' 'Evelina,' and 'Camilla'; she was much more like sensible, patient, charitable Jane Bennet, and might live to lack a stern but remorseful Darcy.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUBALTERN'S RETURN.

MARY ALDOUR was surprised one morning by a letter from Flora Robertson. ‘My dear Miss Macdonnel,’ (Flora Robertson was one of the few, of the very few persons who was not in the way of styling Mary to her face—Mary Aldour; the whole glen did it without scruple; it was even on the tip of Finralia’s tongue,)—‘My dear Miss Macdonnel—Extend to me your warmest congratulations. I have word that Maclean’s regiment, so long exposed to war’s rude shocks while I was torn by the cruellest alarms, is ordered home, is on its passage, is so near Britain’s shores that we expect the presence among us of one of old too dear to me, but now to be openly acknowledged as my bridegroom within a week or two at the utmost. I have addressed you frankly, feeling sure that you will sympathize with me in my pride and bliss. I have been cautious of burdening my friends with the depression and anxiety of these long, trying years of separation, but I cannot resist calling upon them now to rejoice with me when tribulation is

ended, and, as I trust, a lifetime of perfect happiness is in store for me. I claim your presence and that of my dear Miss Anne Macdonald, with whom we are all so charmed, and about whose gentility and softness that stupid boy Finlay is quite foolish (but this is strictly between ourselves; not a word to offend her refined delicacy), among our first visitors at Croclune to witness and share in the harmony and delight of our family reunion.' The letter was signed 'Flora Maclean,' with an exclamation, 'at last the dear title!' and there was a postscript: 'John Dunglas told us last night that you had not gone to Kinglussie.'

Mary threw down the note in a far from sympathizing—in a hugely wrathful mood.

'So Flora Robertson has got her end at last, and that red-and-white lisping Maclean has turned up to release her from her ordeal, and establish her in her dubious dignity; but "pride and bliss" indeed! the most disgraceful story within my day in the Country; the most unpleasing man, as I have heard; she must be thoroughly ashamed to look the fellow in the face; they must both be affronted at their folly; I wonder what he will think of the languishing airs and tonish graces she has learned; at least he has been reluctant enough to assume his privileges and duties; "perfect happiness" as a reward for deceit and disobedience! I wonder at some people's confidence. But she does not feel what she pretends. Flora is always staring you in the face as if she would look

through and through you and discover how much you distrusted and disliked her—an agreeable process. She wants us at Aldour to countenance them, and she is not so much monopolized but she would put in an oar for that oaf and groom Finlay, or is it only to show her incredibility with regard to what exists between John Dunglas and Anne? Now, if I were Anne I would cure John Dunglas of his unworthy hankering after Croclune. I believe he goes more there than Roderick Finralia thinks fit to do. It may be a sort of good nature and ease, but I would not like it; it should be either them or me; to go and bring that painted leather fan from Inverluig to Nancy Robertson t' other day—though I dare say she asked him for it—when he is all but engaged to Anne Macdonald. But fortunately it is no business of mine, and Anne is the best girl in the world and deserves a saint. Nobody hereabout is good enough for Anne in one sense. Not that John Dunglas is not a kind, pretty sort of fellow. I used to think him all that, and my heart always warms to him; but alas! friends of my heart, he is not like him we were wont to pore over, (the 'man of men,' not unbecoming the company of Conlath and Cuthullin,) when we read 'Sir Charles Grandison' by turns as we worked in the arbour in the garden at Inverluig.'

Anne took a different view of the case. Could not help being thankful for the establishment of the nuptials. Flora Robertson had been a wretched bride for the best part of ten years; now the careworn look

would leave her face ; now she might give up the incessant self-assertion which, latent or active, was so painfully perceptible in her manner and conduct ; the deep wound to her pride would be healed ; the harassing aggravation to her temper would be withdrawn ; the miserable worry and mortification of her ignorance with regard to the future would cease. The being she had loved and trusted was restored to her ; he had not deserted her ; he had not married a second wife as people had wickedly suggested he might have done.

'My dear,' interrupted Mary abruptly, 'Flora Robertson never loved or trusted any mortal but herself since she was born.'

'Oh ! Mary, I think you must be mistaken. Granting that she was very wilful and imprudent, there is actually—not only no apology, but no reason for her elopement with Lieutenant Maclean except a personal attachment to him, which, however ill-balanced and uncontrolled, must have been ardent as it certainly has been true, having coloured all her subsequent life, poor girl. I think we are at liberty to trust that its punishment is worked out, and that it will now make her not only happier, as she hopes, but better.'

'You are a good creature, Anne, but I cannot bear to hear you wasting your goodness defending and excusing Flora Robertson ; that woman is a toad ; you need not jump ; you need not hold your breath ; of course I have spoken rashly and roughly, and I am

sorry to put ill into your charitable head, but I repeat Flora Robertson never cared for any one but herself yet, except in the most moderate degree. You do not know the Robertsons, Anne, how bold and yet heartless they are. I believe it was perfectly possible for Flora's love of herself to take the form of a discreditable passion for Lieutenant Maclean, when she was a young wild girl like Nancy, and that having entertained the fancy she chose to indulge it against every risk and obstacle, but I don't call that the elevating principle of pure affection and ennobling love "twice blessed," blessing "him who gives and him who takes," and neither do you, dear.'

'But you see, Mary, what she writes of family peace and reunion. I won't give up the idea that her regard for Lieutenant Maclean had some virtue in it, and that such is evident by its being freed from its element of antagonism, and showing a longing for a reconciliation with the whole world.'

'My dear Anne, truth compels me to remind your unworldliness that Captain Robertson had a violent meeting and parting with Maclean before he sailed, and that he stated at the time, publicly, as if he needed to proclaim a defence for keeping an open house for these idle subalterns, and for allowing Flora to dwell till people were actually tired of her at every house in the Country where Maclean was to be met with, that he would have called the insolent fellow out, if it had not been that he could not bear to make his poor child a widow by her father's hand. They are

all very magnanimous if they have forgiven these words, and the shameful charges of shabbiness, selfishness, and baseness, which were bandied between them. But of course Captain Robertson is still bound by the obligation not to slay his own son-in-law ; the Minister should call upon him and teach him if he can a higher, broader Christianity, Anne. And now Maclean is no nearer his company ; and though he is justly forced to share his lieutenant's pay with the woman he made his wife in frolic or malice, or mere slavery to her youthful attractions, Flora, with all her management, and she will arrange wonderfully to get him promotion by hook or by crook, will find it a small income ; and so she will be obliged to look in her turn to Captain Robertson, and just as the Captain could not shoot Maclean for leaving Flora in every sense destitute, and with that story against her, a burden on his hands, Flora will swallow down all the ill words against Maclean, all the anger and reproaches (and really they were forbearing to 'Flory'—more than she deserved, allowed her in her austerity—Flora is an austere woman, now—to rule over them, domineer over her mother and dictate to the other girls) because she also will look to the Captain for a little friendly assistance. Flora will have the face to do it, hampered as her father is—say twice a year, at Michaelmas and Martinmas, besides convenient visits to Croclune when they are flitting from one barrack to another—I think I see it all ; there is the foundation of the harmony, Anne, I doubt.'

'I think not ; I believe not. It is not like you, Mary, to be so sarcastic and bitter.'

'Am I as bad as Finralia ? I am afraid I cannot be merciful to the Robertsons.'

'But has Lieutenant Maclean no connexions to assist him ?'

'No, no ; or else he would have been a person of more consequence ; he would have been sooner pardoned ; you would have expected even me to have had more consideration for him. His father was a captain in an English infantry regiment, and a younger son of a younger son of Rotha's. He fell into a great rage at his son's want of principle and absurdity, and he is dead since, and left all his effects to buy an annuity for a harmless old sister who never offended him. Do you mean to rise up as their fairy godmother, Anne ? Oh ! my child, seek fitter and more graceful recipients for your bounty. I cannot abide these Robertsons.'

Notwithstanding, when the formal invitation came for Aldour (Mrs. Macdonnel had given up visiting, and only saw company and plenty of it in her own house), Mary, and Anne, to drink tea, sup, and sleep at Croclune to meet Lieutenant Maclean, with whom they had none of them flattering recollections or associations, and to celebrate the festivity of a marriage which had been run into eight or nine years before, and which had better have been admitted and no more said of it for truth, and sense, and genuine sentiment's sake, they accepted this call on

their civility likewise, though Mary did say that she was beginning to think they must have done with the Robertsons ; really they asked too much of them ; it was too great a tax to pay to neighbours, that of gracing so many different occasions in their lives—hay-makings and old marriages and so on, when one's feelings, to be anything wholesome, ought to be altogether different.

How would it have been with the family at Aldour if they had contemned ancient tolerance and modern expediency, and been fairly rude to the Robertsons and stayed at home ? On what fine threads of the web of life—happily unguessed, our destinies turn.

Go they did to Croclune, so lovely without and often so ugly within ; and they had not the advantage of its scenery to-night, for at a tea and card party it would have been an egotistical and adventurous young lady indeed, who would have damaged her social reputation, by deserting the company and roaming in her pumps, and yard and a half of dressed hair over the grass and under the oaks. They would at least have the advantage of confronting John Dunglas with his friends, Mary thought in her heart, half spitefully, half mischievously. Aldour, hearty, though a little gloomy, as he had been of late—certainly the shifting prices, the failures in the crops, the damaged credit, never firmly re-settled since long before the outbreak of the '45, ruining the Highlands, and driving her sons into emigration, were beginning to tell on the sanguine, free-handed

Laird ; Mary, sceptical of any proper reason for the gala, not in her pleasantest mood, a little high and dry, yet warmhearted, generous Mary still ; and Anne, with her little refined face—glad and gracious in every line—glad to encounter the blue coat and powdered hair of John Dunglas, though she fell in with his plaiden jacket and undressed yellow curls in easier circumstances every day of her life, gracious to all the world, sufficient to melt the heart of a stone.

There was a considerable assemblage of the Country magnates, yet not so great as at the haymaking. There was an economical dole out of the best people like the Aldours, and a reserve kept to salt another banquet. In the same way the worst families were divided, and Mary was favoured with the observation that Roderick Finralia was absent. Flora's ambition would not be satisfied without a round of gaiety on the announcement of her marriage, yet Mary's heart, so unbendingly righteous, smote her when she saw Flora in what ought to have been her wedding dress—the blush lutestring—so long unworn, because clearly there was a worm in the heart of Flora's rose ; in the midst of her triumph she was conscious of mortification, and still saw or imagined many a covert sneer under the forms of her society, her world.

' You are quite in the mode, my dear Flora,' remarked in an accent of astonishment Pitfadden's supercilious fool of a wife. ' An't you clever at altering your dresses if they were made such a long while ago ?'

'Did not you and the Lieutenant find each other a good deal changed, Miss Flory? I beg your pardon, Mrs Maclean?' insinuated a wicked old maid. 'Dear life! how droll it would have been if you had not recognised each other!'

Other brides were not jeered about their height of the fashion; other brides had not their new and prized appellations now pronounced, now omitted, as if their very existence remained still uncertain; other brides and bridegrooms were never suspected of having dropped out of each other's acquaintance, no, not although they had been engaged couples separated by half a century's foreign service for the one and weary waiting for the other. Certainly Flora had been chary of taking the world into her confidence in her vexation; she had pointed a moral and adorned a tale with general reflections on trials and sufferings when she had grown proud, stiff, and staid, but she had been close upon her individual experience. If Lieutenant Maclean had died abroad, or roved perennially like Ulysses or Eneas, it might not have suited Flora to have gone into regular or figurative widowhood on his account; so, as she had kept her own counsel as far as she could, submitted to the half concealment of her marriage, smothered her regret, she could hardly expect the world to confess with a good grace to being fully apprised of the data with their fortunate conclusion, and to rejoice in her joy whenever she chose to give the signal; but there was no less a sharp sting in the failure.

In reality the late proclamation of what was all along understood to be a marriage was awkward for all parties—very awkward for Flora and Lieutenant Maclean ; it required all the assurance of the Robertsons to brazen it out ; even knowing Flora's calculating, determined turn, Mary almost wondered that she provoked the trial.

And besides, by Flora's changing colour, restless glances, random answers, and flighty gaiety assumed as a cloak to her chagrin, so different from her late overbearing hardness and coldness, Mary was let into a secret. Anne had not been altogether wrong. The truest thing about Flora Robertson had been her fondness for that mincing, indifferent Maclean ; it had survived her worldliness and his expatriation ; it existed still, spurring and scourging her as neither glance nor speech of the world without could aggrieve and incense the strong-willed, but broken-in woman. And what support had Flora under this woman's conflict ? Mrs. Robertson a nonentity, Captain Robertson a coarse man of the world, Nancy a skittish hoyden. Mary felt a remorseful pang in her animosity, she went up and drew the bride's arm through hers—she had never been so familiar with her since they were children ; she engaged her to come over to Aldour before she left the Country, if Lieutenant Maclean was to rejoin his regiment, and render their departure certain ; she took notice of a miniature which Flora wore as a brooch, and praised the likeness, though her quick woman's eyes detected that the paint-

ing must have been taken before Maclean went abroad ; and she transferred on the spot until further provocation her aversion from Flora Robertson to that lisping gentleman bearing his Majesty's commission, whom neither the French nor the Indians had rid of his affectation. Lieutenant Maclean answered to the account of Mr. Jerningham : ' a mighty delicate gentleman, looks to be painted, and is all daintification in manners, speech, and dress.' If Mary had been a man she could have called him out, having no such impediment to the gratification of her feelings as restrained Captain Robertson.

Maclean behaved badly ; his position was difficult, almost disgraceful, but he was far from raising it by honest compunction, by an eager desire to make amends for all the injuries he had inflicted.

Captain Robertson was overdoing his part. Maclean this, and Maclean that. ' My good fellow, I cannot let you sit in the draught before your wife's eyes.' ' Miss Anne Macdonald, you will find Maclean a great authority on the topics which interest young ladies ; if he has not writ verses, he has spouted them, and he is a great hand at compliments ; a sad fellow ! but tied at last, and not without a will to a quiet fireside after campaigning—eh ! Maclean ?

The Captain's effrontery was admirable, but the subaltern did not respond ; he had been a superfine dandy who had not been above being struck by a buxom romp like Flora, and above all gained by her direct admiration. He had been scandalously quies-

cent in her hands, but it was not from any softness of heart, though it might have been from a softness of head. It was a bad sign of him that all the real men, from Aldour to John Dunglas, were repulsed by him. He had not been improved by his travels; he had come to Croclune because he had a conviction that if he did not, his wife would seek him out anywhere within the bounds of the British Isles. And now Flora might be of use to him, though she had grown so old, and formal, and tiresome; and that cool fellow her father might as well do something to contribute to their support, since he had not dissolved their connexion, but constituted himself a party to it. What craft, and callousness, and cruelty might exist in that pink-and-white lounging beau! His only display of wit was in troubling that poor cipher Mrs. Robertson, who was persistently admiring 'Maclean's regimental buttons' to any one who would sit and simper for a while before they whisked off out of hearing; and his sole address to Flora in the midst of his neglect partook of the nature of an insult. He was rudely, under his artificial polish, teasing Nancy into a passion about a weak point with the girl—her stoutness, and predicting what she would be when she was five-and-twenty; he looked across to Flora: 'I remember, Madam, you used to speak a great deal of ladies in their teens, but I suppose you have exhausted the allusions.' Oh! the imperturbability, if it were not the insolence of the man who saw the bridal flowers still mingled with the thinned hair and

nodding over the sunk cheeks—and what his share had been in the waste made by years many persons present would have come forward and sworn with a will. But as Flora had sown so she must reap, and she would be used to the crop by and by, only while the shoots of her old love still lingered in her breast he must trample upon them.

Lieutenant Maclean's share in the entertainment of the guests was patronizing, perplexing, and, in the end, persecuting Anne Macdonald with the idlest and most intrusive attentions. At first Anne received them willingly, thinking to do good, to propitiate all parties, to please Flora—oh, simple Anne!—by her courteous regard to the bridegroom worse than a stranger to his wife's kindred, and she was in consternation when she found that she was doing wrong; that Mary looked annoyed, that Flora with smooth smiles watched her with ever sharper eyes, and that John Dunglas first stared reproachfully and then resentfully; and still that creature, as the novels of the day called him, in his short-waisted, deep-cuffed red coat, hung about her, and was not to be repulsed by any engine of Anne's construction and management.

Flora need not have minded; her spouse was only following out her own instinct. Annè Macdonald was the most genteelly bred and equipped person present: not the great laird Pitfadden's wife, with all her pretensions, could eclipse her even to his dull perceptions; and Maclean's selection of her in the first place had only been of a piece with his conceit and arrogance.

It was only when he saw that he created a sensation, that some persons were surprised, that Flora and others were indignant, that the attack became deliberate.

At Anne's elbow during the cards, and at the spinnet when she sang 'Mournful Melpomene,' her partner in the reels which the younger members of the party got up in a corner, on a stool at Anne's feet while the tables were drawn out and covered for supper, by her side for the rest of the evening during the long seat which included all the healths and toasts and sentiments, proposing Miss Anne Macdonald as his belle with his hand on his breast, dinging into her abhorrent ears sneers at these his native Highlands, and extravagant encomiums on the great world of which he fancied himself a knowing blade, a perfect denizen.

Manners were free and lively then. 'Dr. Johnson talked a great deal, and Lady Betty Hamilton went and placed her chair close to his, leant upon the back of it and listened eagerly.' A young Highland matron of rank put her arms round Dr. Johnson's neck and kissed him in token of admiration of his genius and welcome to the North, in the centre of an applauding circle. Mr. Murphy compelled Fanny Burney to sit in *tête-à-tête* over her unhappy play, 'The Witlings,' in a public place, till all the world pricked their ears, and Mr. Seward cried impatiently for the third time, 'Why, Miss Burney, Dr. Solander (the famous traveller) is speaking of your brother's ship.' Henry Earl of Moreland played at forfeits with his equals;

and Miss Bolton was condemned to hold the candle, and Harry to kiss the candlestick—and not only so, but Harry preferred the permanent to the temporary candlestick, and when ridiculed for his simplicity, stated bluntly that he had no mind to the false metal.

Thus Maclean could seat himself at Anne's feet, in mock homage, without actual offence, and it would be making far too much of a trifle for Aldour to resent the folly, though even he peered at the impertinence through his white eyelashes and shifted on his seat restlessly, while John Dunglas looked as black as thunder. The more distressed Anne grew in her invincible, involuntary civility, the greater the amusement to Maclean. Mary tried diversion after diversion in vain, till she cried in extreme vexation, what a noodle she must be to be unable to fight that doll Maclean! But if they had braved the spleen of the elder ladies and gone out to walk under the oaks by the twinkle of the evening star, Maclean would have assuredly pursued them. If Mary had succeeded in organizing what she was accustomed to put down as a silliness—‘a miss party’—that is, a move of all the girls to another room, she could foresee that Maclean would saunter out along with them, and push his way in with them, though Mary shut the door in his face, or Nancy threatened to put one of her mother's caps on his head, as foreigners—fat German burghers—dance a figure of the cotillon. Mary could not call Anne out of the set; she could not lock her up or put her into her pocket until they

got home again ; she could only wait perforce and reflect that the night was wearing through ; soon the company would disperse ; their division would start betimes in the morning for the first corn-cutting in Aldour, and Maclean should never have it in his power to take the same liberty again. On Thursday they were to go over to Dunglas, with the understanding that Anne should see her future glen and house, and be presented to old Dunglas, John Dunglas's father. It was well they had so interesting an event before them ; it would be all made up then and there ; nothing would come of these cross-purposes and this forsown puppy's interference in the play.

But Mary's mind misgave her when she saw John Dunglas dancing in abandonment with Nancy Robertson as on the night of the haymaking—and Nancy who had been so cross of late, as various members of her family complained, but who was so blithe to-night, and, as Mary Aldour was driven to admit, so brilliant in a wild rustic way, and in her evident childish preference still maintained and still displayed for John Dunglas, careless of his new circumstances.

People were remarking it ; the gross inconsistency of John Dunglas ; the audacious recklessness of Nancy. Mary had the mortification to hear whispers, 'John Dunglas had better take care what he is about ; that coxcomb Maclean may at least serve as a warning.' 'What ! I thought it was all fixed, and that John Dunglas was paying very particular suit to Miss Anne Macdonald.'

When John Dunglas was not attending upon Nancy he was sitting beside Mrs. Maclean, and Flora was whispering to him assiduously, and her eyes were glittering dangerously. He was decidedly avoiding Mary, and he was haughty and distant when he could not escape her; and he left at last with some of the other guests without any private leavetaking to Anne, without a word of the day so nigh, at Dunglas.

Mary felt indignant and uneasy, and did not wonder that Anne was nervous after they had retired for the night, and went to sleep evidently with a heavier heart than when she had lain down in the same tartan-hung bed, with the wood and the water rustling round her, smarting from the adder's bite. But the misunderstanding was so causeless, so baseless, that Mary would not suffer it to weigh on her mind for a moment in the next morning's light and sunshine.





CHAPTER IX.

FLORA'S LESSON TO JOHN DUNGLAS.

MACLEAN is quite taken with Miss Anne Macdonald,' Flora observed to John Dun-
glas, looking him keenly in the face, and
with her high-colour, so contrasting with
her fallen-in cheeks, that if painting had
crossed the Forth and the Tay he might have suspected
she rouged. 'She is really very captivating, Miss Anne
Macdonald, on first acquaintance.'

'And what is she on a continuance of your acquain-
tance ?'

'Well, I think no one ever comes to know much
more of her ; she is always the same, but I never
cared for that compliment ; she does not progress on
your regard ; a sweet girl, but a piece of still life ;
liking all her friends in an equal degree ; a very ex-
emplary and a very contented character ; heigho ! I
wish we were all as rational. Yet, no, John Dunglas,
I would rather taste the full flow of soul once in a
while, though it should embitter the rest of my exist-
ence, and so, I think, would you. However, to go
back to Miss Anne Macdonald, she is very unassum-

ing and very affable; see how pleasant she is with Maclean, quite as cordial as if he were you or any other friend whom she had encountered a hundred times since she came into the Country. No wonder she is a general favourite. But, by the by, John Dunglas, I may be very giddy in making these remarks to you, for I hear that you have a peculiar interest in that quarter; if so, I hope you will not take them ill, but attribute them to the freedom of old acquaintance, and to a certain tumult of feeling which has impelled me to say everything that has come into my head for the last day or two.'

John Dunglas answered as nineteen out of twenty young men would have done—that he had not the honour to claim a private interest in Miss Anne Macdonald, and that he thought it was best to speak out; and that he imagined that the removal of a galling restraint and the return of an absent friend must be about as delightful sensations as a human being could experience in this world—and John Dunglas sighed, for he was conscious that his own sensations, which had lately been so delightful, were of a very mixed and distracting description this evening.

Flora did not give him time to analyse them; she returned to the charge, for at that moment Anne Macdonald had finished a song which Flora used to sing, and Maclean was leaning over her chair and praising it without bounds; he had never heard it receive such justice; what would it have been to him to have heard that voice when he was banished in

the horrid forests and by the barbarous rivers of America ? but to listen to it now was half a recompense.

It was great nonsense, but it was too bad to overhear it ; too bad for Flora, who had sat up thinking of him, and lain down and dreamt of him in these forests and by these rivers of the western wilderness—and this was their reunion ! And she would have wandered after him, and mended his clothes, and cooked his food, and nursed him if he had been wounded—and this was their reunion ! But she was Mrs. Maclean ; she would leave the Country where she had taken the false step which had degraded her in the people's eyes. Maclean must ultimately rise in his profession ; she would have independence and influence ; and at this moment she had John Dunglas in her power, and through Dunglas she might vex that rich Lowland girl who had humbled her before her friends ; and who knows but she might aid Nancy ; Nancy was an ungrateful, regardless girl, but she was Flora's sister, and, do you see, a good turn to Nancy would not be lost to Flora.

Mary Aldour was not cunning when she argued that Flora had no sufficient motive to come between John Dunglas and Anne ; pooh ! pooh ! a silly joke, the idlest impertinence, not worth speaking of, however reprehensible it might be as a matter of taste. But magnify it, Mary, by a wounded woman's bitterness, by the madness of the 'love to hatred turned,' by the chance, however wild, of aggrandizement to the

family. Reflect ; who inflicts on us the most cruel injuries ? not those whom we have hurt in proportion, not so often those with whom we have been at sore strife, we may be on our guard against them ; but those whom we have laughed at and lost sight of, slighted and passed by, piqued and forgotten, those who had some mean end to serve, some petty gain to win. Consider that truth, and the danger will wax greater and greater, and swell out, and lower, and gloom before your affrighted eyes.

'Ah ! yes,' answers Flora to John Dunglas's half kind, half pained words,—'Ah ! yes, it is all very delightful, but it is overcoming ; one does not know how to behave for a season, and it is like a rest to get out of the ferment and tell a little of one's feelings, and chat one's self into composure with a friend. I think I may call you an old friend, though you are my junior, John Dunglas, and you may have thought me quite a strict, elderly person ; I know Nancy would laugh at us as equals—a matron of all these years' standing and a fine young man just about to make a dash in the Country. But I assure you I do take a deep interest in your welfare, and I may confess to you that on that account, entirely on that account, I am very glad to hear you say that there is no truth in the report about you and Miss Anne Macdonald. Such stories people tell ! Nancy, for one, never would believe it. "I know him better," she said. You know how enthusiastic and affectionate poor dear Nancy is. "John Dunglas would never marry for conveni-

ence or profit ;" she quite stormed about that ; "and John Dunglas would not be satisfied with a mere fine lady ; he likes a frank girl ; he cares for nature and feeling." And really, though Nancy is but a bairn, she is right ; she understands your noble tempet. There ! I have paid you a compliment, John Dunglas ; they say I should leave those to Maclean—he is such a courtly fellow, he cannot help himself. Now don't blush like an honest chield as you are—that is best, John Dunglas ; and pray don't take the last sentence amiss as the greatest freedom of all. These Lowland wives—they don't suit in the Highlands ; I have seen something of them. Between ourselves, Pitfadden's wife is before you. There she is, either moping at home or quite excited in company ; shabby in the old Highland ways—my father was not invited to dinner the last day he was over. Finralia, their agent, is not bidden sit down at table, although he is as long descended a man as any in the Country. At the Pitfadden games only the genteel company were entertained ; think of such a distinction ! But what had they to do with the amusements and refreshments of shepherds, hunters, and fishers ? she asked. A third of their own folk about the place, both of the runners and the waiters among the clippers, feeders, milkers, and knitters, dismissed to starvation or crime. I wonder Pitfadden can consent. I hear that the smuggling and illicit distilling will be doubled this year. Then she is so senseless ; would have plum-trees planted on the garden wall ; and she is so lavish about her own comforts and

luxuries ; has had painters all the road from Perth—Inverluig would not suit her—for a month in the house ; and new hangings to the drawing-room, when Pitfadden ordered the last upon their marriage ; and ever so many crates of china, the half of them broken in the carriage. She declared there was hardly anything in the house beyond bare necessaries between silver dishes and wooden luggies ; and she has brought up a Lowland cook—a Lowland cook for Highland mutton, and venison, and loads of game, on the one hand, and no markets on the other. No wonder Pitfadden curses instead of saying a grace when the covers are removed, and sits taking a glass to keep his stomach after the spoiled dishes, in place of his bottle of claret and his saunter to the bothy, or the pen, or the fish-nets, or the vermin-traps, like a Highland gentleman. There is a Sassenach lady for you !'

' I dare say it must be trying, madam,' granted John Dunglas wearily and impatiently, but amending the admission by a silent but enlivening counter query. ' And what do you propose to do in the Low Country ? Won't their customs be as puzzling to you as ours can be to Pitfadden's wife or Anne Macdonald ? And I'm sure they need not envy you trying them with a stuck-up, sorry dandy of a partner like Maclean.'

' But I am afraid you will cause a great disappointment.'

John Dunglas started and looked eager. ' What do you mean, Miss Robertson ? Oh, pray excuse me, Mrs. Maclean.'

'No ceremony, John Dunglas ; you will learn better in time. To the Aldour family, of course. I don't suppose she would take it ill, though she may have been taught to regard you as a likely admirer, if you should not in the end make her an offer of your hand. These sweet girls have so many beaux, particularly when they have the good or bad fortune to be heiresses. How much money will she have, I wonder ? Her father made it in trade, but that only adds to its probable extent ; it might be of some moment to many Highland lairds, Dunglas. But these pretty heiresses, in spite of their attractions, are accustomed to that sort of thing ; they have always such lots of danglers after them, so many strings to their bow. Question but—not to flatter you, sir—the man she likes best she saw last winter in Glasgow or Edinburgh, and he danced the last minuet with her in place of "Nancy Dawson," and his hat had the newest cock, and he presented her with a tortoise-shell *stui*. But he didn't come forward, or her friends don't approve, and she was to be the better of a little change ; and we will admit she has borne the cross properly, behaved nicely, enjoyed her sojourn in the North, and won excellent opinions from us passionate Highlanders. Mercy ! what deep gulfs and sad labyrinths love leads us into ! how it causes us to risk our worldly prosperity, to break our hearts and die outright ! Barbara Dairy told me her cousin Janet, a merry girl of Nancy's age, has sickened and died within three weeks for the poor youth killed in Pitfadden's quarry ;

she never smiled or ate a morsel of food of her own accord after she heard the news of the accident. You see the difference between civilized and savage life. Grant that we are the least in the world savage, even we in the upper classes in this quarter, Dunglas. But I meant to warn you about the Aldour family—the worthiest people in these parts, only a little disposed to rule in the Country, and natural enough when they are so bound up in their glen ; and this desire which we all see so plainly, is all fair and honourable, and not more than might have been expected. They are anxious to retain Miss Anne Macdonald near them. She is their kinswoman, and will be a most agreeable neighbour to them ; she will always look up to them as her first friends here ; she would appeal even from you, if you were man and wife, to Aldour, and Mrs. Macdonnel, and Mary, and all the old bodachs and cailliachs who have petted her inordinately—and I have heard men do not like that kind of preference, though I know it not in my own lot ; I find Maclean very generous. Do you imagine that Aldour is getting hampered ? He has been very foolish in his house-keeping, acting always as if he were the first man in the Country—the Marquis, not to say Pitfadden or Corryarrick ; and Mrs. Macdonnel and Mary, for all their wisdom, have abetted him. They do say he is embarrassed now in his money matters ; his thousands of acres do not bring him half as many hundreds, and if he has spent any capital he had on his succession, I should not wonder if he were pressed for cash.

Well ! what a pity to let Miss Anne Macdonald's fine fortune, which belongs of right to the clan, be laid out or float idly in the Low Country, and do no good, unless to render a rich young girl a little richer. If she married a good friend and neighbour now, Aldour might borrow what he needs till better times. What so simple as that she should accommodate him ? Indeed I would say it would be very ungrateful if she did not ; her own uncle, the head of the elder branch of the house, and so kind to her ; but I dare say her Low Country relations might object, if she were not under more friendly guidance. Mind, I don't say that it won't be repaid ; I believe Aldour incapable of proposing an unhandsome or unfair transaction ; I always liked bluff, honest old Aldour the best of them all, so I hope Miss Anne Macdonald will yet assist him out of his strait, though it should not be by your means.'

John Dunglas had started again, but this time in dismay. It was very strange, but there was some foundation for Flora Robertson's last statement ; he could confirm it thus far ; his father had done bills with Aldour which the latter had difficulty in meeting, and Anne had hinted to him that she suspected her uncle's property was too heavily burdened, and had thrown out suggestions for which he could have worshipped her at the moment, that she looked forward to doing some good in the matter—did he not think she might, without offending their high spirit ; could he counsel her on the point ? Still

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John Dunglas wrestled with the tempter, and interposed coldly—‘In that case, would not the Aldour family try to retain Anne Macdonald entirely for themselves?’

‘Oh, no! that would be bad. Remember, they are only snatching at a lawful support, to which they are in a great degree entitled. They are upright people, and very proud of their uprightness. They would not even keep her for Charlie Aldour when he comes back from College, because he is too young, and it would be too barefacedly selfish. They are not desperate, they are merely in debt; and with poor Aldour so thoughtless, and the large family, and these poor deformed, diseased younger children, it must be a great thought, a great responsibility, to Mrs. Macdonnel and Mary. One must not look for out-of-the-world disinterestedness while we are in the world, John Dunglas.’

Perhaps he had been so foolish as to expect it. Any way he was troubled, angered, utterly disordered. If he had been five years older, if he had been less susceptible to impressions, less ductile, and, at the same time, had a less fiery temper, he would have risen and distanced her. ‘Madam,’ he would have said, ‘I am much obliged by the concern which you appear to take in my affairs, but in future I should be still more obliged if you would leave me alone to take care of them, as I mean to manage them for myself. And I beg to inform you that I intend to go my own way, quite irrespective of our recent conversation.’ But he said nothing of the kind. John Dunglas simply muttered

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that he was obliged to Flora, and rose up to dance again with Nancy, looking love, ay ! speaking love to him, and with his heart swollen and rankling, not with one doubt, but with a host of suspicions and offences. Flora had treated him scientifically ; she had now coaxed, now taunted him, till all his worst qualities were rampant ; she had made use of Anne Macdonald's nurture, her temper, her fortune, to which he alone was to be superior, her friends and his, the Aldours—all were turned against the gir'. Flora had sown jealousy between him and the Aldours ; she had all but persuaded him that he, the unstable but wilful lad, was a mere puppet to serve the plans of others, and nothing was real, and nobody was true, and it was all lukewarmness and guile from beginning to end.

No wonder John Dunglas took refuge with Nancy, candid, bouncing Nancy, and listened with a kind of sullen pleasure to her straightforward addresses to his inclinations. ‘Would you like to dance the cotillon, John Dunglas ? I will call to the fiddler ; never mind what the others want. You shall sit here, John Dunglas—yes, you shall—opposite my father, and close to the pastries ; there are only creams at the other end of the table. Oh ! don’t laugh and pretend that you don’t care ; I have fixed upon this seat for you, and I will go to that side table behind you ; no, you can’t come with me there for this reason, that you are John Dunglas and I am only young Nancy Robertson of Croclune. Do you wish with all your soul

that you were a younger son like Dugald Macintosh ? Ah ! so do I ; I do, indeed, John Dunglas. But we will be near each other, that will we, and I can hear what you say to your neighbours, and you can throw me a word over your shoulder. What ? you will throw me your rose ? Ah ! do, John Dunglas, and see if I will not cherish it and plant the slip,' and Nancy's fingers actually trembled as she caught the prickly token. 'I believe it is from Mary Aldour's china rose-tree in the tub in the hall at Aldour. But never mind ; you need not look to see if Mary Aldour or Miss Anne Macdonald are noticing what you are about ; they would not care though you gave away your head ; nothing you would do could put them out, they are so taken up with themselves ; so sensible, and grand, and good-natured. Oh ! I am sure I envy them.' So the red lips chattered, ever showing the white teeth, and keeping harmony with the dark eyes now flashing, now languishing.





CHAPTER X.

'HE UP THE LONG LOAN TO MY BLACK COUSIN
BESS.'

HE next day saw Mary Aldour and Anne at home in their own safe, bright lodging of the House of Aldour, where they could 'laugh' when they were 'merry,' and 'sigh' when they were 'sad,' removed from the Robertsons of Croclune, and what Mary termed their fleabane, unless they chose to summon them on the carpet. Both had a secret notion that the cloud on their horizon would be dissipated, and their temporary cares scattered to the winds, and that they would laugh at the cross purposes of Croclune; and Mary might perhaps be guilty of mimicking Lieutenant Maclean's inflated adulation, and John Dunglas would first colour and then laugh the loudest of all, and call for a repetition of the farce—the picking up of the handkerchief, the turning over the leaves of the music; and then Mary would grow demure and scold herself, and then take off John Dunglas for his volatility pretty sharply. But it would do him good, and help him to self-knowledge.

Possibly it was this coolness, this ‘tiff’ between the lovers which was needed to bring their affairs to a crisis, and rid them of the perilous consequences of John Dunglas’s procrastination and Anne’s equanimity.

Still Anne did ask Mary one question in a faltering voice about noon when the parlour and house were most deserted. Mrs. Macdonnel was not nearer than her bedchamber, where she was reeling up the spinners’ hasps of yarn, and methodically superintending her little ones’ light tasks, and with great judgment and tenderness, not superseding them, but proportioning them to their suffering condition—a discretionary power which she never delegated, not even to Mary. The maids were away to the pasture to milk the cows, led by the Dubh bheidheach (the Black Beauty), kept for the immediate use of the family. The men were at the nets in the loch, or out in the fields looking after the colts and heifers; the only one at home was Alister, the piper, the descendant of the old pipers who had played the war marches, the gatherings, and the laments of the old Macdonnels of Aldour, and who was therefore privileged to indulge in his reveries, and lead with great gravity and dignity a perfectly idle, musical life. Alister, not unlike a poor, stolid, but proud, enthusiastic, and fine-eared German bandmaster, was blowing up his chanter in the hall—a most heterogeneously furnished hall—a maids’ room, where they span, a fisher’s and hunter’s rendezvous for their spoil, a toolhouse and seed

granary also, yet pleasant enough when the peat fire crackled on the huge hearthstone in winter, or the sunlight stole through the narrow window in summer. The continued drone—not more disturbing than the pipe of the humble bee to those to whose ears it sounded as part of their nation, their rank, their place—served this good purpose, it deadened other sounds, and rendered her own voice bearable to the reserved girl who had a weight on her mind which she wished lightened, and a difficulty she wished solved.

' You were speaking of Nancy Robertson's being such a child, Mary, and she is quite a child in her manners, and I suppose she has been a kind of little playfellow of John Dunglas, as he has had no brothers or sisters of his own, nor known a mother—only his old father. But have you no idea that their connexion may cost her dear, that she has got seriously attached, as a woman I mean, to John Dunglas? And—and I don't believe he has that kind of regard for her, though he was so full of attention to her last night, like my swain. No, no, John Dunglas has no resemblance to that horrid Lieutenant Maclean, only I could fancy that twelve hours ago they were about equal in earnestness.'

Mary listened in great disdain, not at Anne, but at every other person concerned, measured out in a sliding scale. ' I have no patience with them ; John Dunglas ought to be soundly rated, and get a fright, if possible, and the whole Robertson race should be

expelled from all upright and conscientious company. I ask no other, I don't mind though people are not a bit cleverer than the old Miss Macdonnels at the Cleugh, or Mrs. Macdonnel at the Schoolhouse, but I must have my company honest. I am glad to hear you call Maclean horrid, my dear ; it is balm to my wounded feelings.'

'But did I do wrong, Mary ? Could I help his absurd pretensions ? I dare say I am often stupid here, though my dear friends in Edinburgh and my aunt Galbraith in Glasgow flattered themselves I was well instructed in the rules of good society. I thought it would be paying too much respect to that man to resent and rebuff his disobliging silliness.'

'You were quite right, Anne, as you always are. You have a great fund of sense, my dear girl, and I could depend upon its dictates in the most delicate situation. If I were tried, I would consult you. But the secret was, you were not in good society last night; you were an angel amongst black cattle, as your friends in the South would hold them, if they did not consider them bears and foxes. I am thoroughly ashamed of my neighbours, beginning with John Dunglas and ending with Nancy Robertson.'

'But, Mary, suppose her heart is touched, suppose he has gained her affections ? I thought last night, more than once, in the midst of her hoyden ways, she was agitated ; she could not keep from trembling when he was standing beside her ; she could hardly help crying over his rose.'

'I would have seen him far enough, and flung the rose in the loch before he had got it from me, if I had guessed its destination. No, dear, it is all a joke on his part, and it is a great shame on hers. What business has a big girl of seventeen or eighteen to persist in being as heedless as a child, and then allow that she is hurt as a woman? Whose blame is it that she does not practise common prudence and a little becoming diffidence? She makes me blush every hour. If she does burn her fingers, it is because she will not dread the fire; she will be bolder and more headstrong than the most ignorant spinner or knitter. Not a girl in Aldour who can spell out her Bible but, I warrant, will behave better to any herdsman or hag-man. And if you are to take it to heart, Anne, and imagine that you are accountable, I am afraid I will begin and hate one and all. Where is the righteousness or justice of your suffering on this occasion? It is a case of clear weakness on John Dunglas's part, and very repelling unwomanliness on Nancy Robertson's.'

Mary dreaded she had spoken too openly, and hastily framed an excuse to drop the subject and leave the room.

Mary was far from satisfied on Anne's account; she was inclined to be hurt for Anne, but she had the discretion and delicacy to understand that it was not a matter for foreign interference, and that the opportunity for drawing back with colours flying, ranks unbroken, and uniform untarnished on both sides, was

long past. It was not easy for Mary to remain neutral; even Aldour had perceived something amiss, and over the relics of the great breakfast which might have served a Samson—the hot and cold beef, the black puddings, the sheep's head which so disgusted Dr. Johnson, the venison soup, the potatoes, then rather a luxury in the Highlands, besides the trifles of scones and cakes, cheese and butter, honey and preserves, tea, coffee, and chocolate, while Mrs. Macdonnel was rinsing out with her own hands her prized little china teapot, and when Anne had gone out at the glass door with the children to count a new flock of water-hens, Aldour detained Mary and sounded her about the last evening's proceedings. ‘Is there anything wrong between John Dunglas and Anne? What did the fellow mean by leaving her to sit beside a married man and a stranger like that trumpery Maclean, who might have had the courtesy to make a little love to his own wife to atone for lost time, I think, and Dunglas taking out another girl, one of the other Robertson girls—that gipsy Nancy Robertson too—set after set?’

Mary laughed him off, asserting that he must examine the chief culprits, really she had neither leisure nor inclination to pry into lovers' quarrels.

This was Tuesday, and on Thursday they were to go to Dunglas; surely John Dunglas would step in at any moment during the day to make his peace, and conclude the final arrangements of the party with which he was to be so much honoured.

But as the hours waned, and the morning gave place to the afternoon, they severally decided that he was too much affronted of himself, as he had good reason to be, to ride or walk over the hills to-day; that he deferred the ceremony till to-morrow, when he would arrive low and humble.

The afternoon was the period of the day when the girls pursued their fine needlework, and were deep in leaves and flowers, holes and corners, and point stitches, and were emulating each other in honourable skill and industry, to decide whether Mary's neckerchief for Mrs. Galbraith in Glasgow would be sooner finished and more beautifully done, than Anne's apron for Mrs. Macdonnel of Aldour. They used to take two good hours at it, sewing, as the Doctor would have said, 'doggedly,' scarcely able to converse for their intentness, and feeling really much the better, wiser, quieter, more capable, for the tough encounter of eyes and fingers, needles and cotton, and great pains and patience.

For the benefits to be derived from needlework, listen to one of its old devotees. 'It exercises fancy, fixes attention, and by perseverance and excellence in it habituates the mind to patient application, and to those peaceful and still life pleasures which form the chief enjoyment of every truly amiable woman.' Hear the same dear old woman a second time, 'I wish people would begin to work tapestry again. I look on my Dresden apron with great delight when I consider how peaceably I sat to work at it, with my thoughts

at liberty for reflection, and all the time forming the habits of quiet application and the love of peace. I have no ambition to hear the modern belles declare their "dark sayings on the harp," till such time as I am convinced that they stay more at home, have less vanity, and make better wives and daughters than formerly.' A great scholar, poet, preacher, argues that the gain is to be acquired by the study of science —elevating, beautifying, and ennobling science ; that the elaborate monstrosities into which the needle has fallen are to be avoided ; and our girls are to be butterfly hunters, flower gatherers, and stone collectors, instead of sempstresses of worsted-work, point-lace, and embroidery. It is scarcely likely that in the nineteenth century an advocate for needlework alone, slavery to needlework, with its crooked spines and dull, blinking eyes, should appear. Honour to the noble philosopher who has wished to render women wiser, more enlightened, and more independent ; but although he has dreamt of many things—glorious things in his philosophy—until he shows that all women are able and willing to become botanists, entomologists, and geologists, that the out-of-door scene is alone desirable, that no private, in-door, unobtrusive, unchanging attraction is indispensable in the needs of the naturally giddy and thoughtless who love change, excitement, notoriety, action, who are ambitious and vain, he has not proved that he is master of every exigency in a woman's life, or that in denying her a female field for so-called taste, skill,

and industry, consistent with perfect quietness and seclusion, and open to all—the great as well as the small—he has planned for her a course likely to render her gentler, more modest, more domestic, more a digester of what she reads and hears, more a disciple of simple duty.

For these two girls, they had a noble sermon in addition, in the shape of Mrs. Macdonnel, the dignified mistress of the house and the devoted, unwearied servant of the little children, sitting with Niel's head on her knees in his enforced rest for his ailing limbs, stroking his hair, listening to his reading of his last favourite book, or reading to him in turn, or carrying Annie in her strong arms out by the fresh loch side.

Some one knocked at the glass door between the parlour and the hall, and Mary, looking round quickly, saw Mrs. Macdonnel of the Schoolhouse. ‘I’m not coming in, Mary Aldour; I’ve no time to spare ; I’m waiting for Macdonnel, who is travelling up with the horse. We’re to ride on to Inverluig and spend the night there. We want to lay in some house stores, for we will not get into the town again till the end of the harvest, and then the weather may be boisterous, or some of the children may be troublesome. Besides, I want to take leave of my cousin Alan and his family before they set out to open the shop in one of the islands. I walked on before, and I want a word with you, Mary, with your leave.’

Mary stepped out readily, thinking, ‘She will want

to know the last prices ; I wonder if we could have supplied her, poor woman, and saved her this journey.' Mrs. Macdonnel of the Schoolhouse filled, in a lower degree, the important place in Aldour which the minister of the parish's wife might have occupied more honourably, had that excellent, erudite man happened to be supplied with a help-meet, and had the Aldours not belonged to the English Church. Mrs. Macdonnel, individually, was an obliging, useful person ; she answered with tolerable exactness to the description of Mrs. Mittin. ' She was good-humoured yet laborious ; gay, yet subservient; poor, yet dissipated (in an inward sense) ; to be useful, she would submit to any drudgery ; to become agreeable, devote herself to any flattery ; to please was her incessant desire, and her rage for popularity included every rank and class of society. The more eminent of course were her first objects, but the same aim descended to the lowest. She would work, read, go on errands, or cook a dinner.' And if she would not be a parasite or a spy because she was a Highland lady, though a poor one, she would certainly submit to be ' an attendant, a drudge, keep a secret or spread a report, incite a quarrel or coax contending parties into peace, invent any expedient or execute any scheme—all with the pretext to oblige others, but all in fact from simple self-love, as prevalent in her mind as in that of the more highly ambitious, though meaner and less dangerous.' But it must be fully understood that Mrs. Macdonnel's self-love and vanity were foibles held unawares ; that she

was a well-meaning woman and sincere in her utmost docility and activity ; and she was of course very popular, and everybody said how well cut out she was for her situation on the confines of gentility, yet called upon to work as hard, and spend as little, and spare as strenuously as the wife of any bailie or game-keeper. The fact was, that education was so rare and highly valued in the Country, that even a high Tory wrote of 'the young gentleman' whom Raarsa kept on the island for one-half of the year to instruct the clan, while he travelled a hundred miles on the mainland to prosecute his own studies during the remaining six months. What cared Mary, though the schoolmaster's coat was patched and his list slippers down at the heel, while he had not even the learned odour of Mr. Cormac Macgregor ? He was no more than a simple, quiet man, only tolerably educated for his post, but rather more than tolerably pedantic on the ground of his slight inoculation with his one dead language whenever he opened his mouth to speak, and his wife believed him to be a polyglot edition of all accomplishments. Of course he was a Duinewasel, and connected with the best in the Country. What was it to Mary that the dwelling of the couple who presided over letters in Aldour was a mere off-shoot on the Schoolhouse, and had a box bed in the sitting-room and a clay floor in the kitchen ? It stood on a 'broomy bit,' with great grey rocks cropping out among the pale green junipers which scented the air stronger than the peat smoke. Mary was quite ready to visit there ; to put

off her hat and mantle and help Mrs. Macdonnel to set the house in order, and to find no fault though the Dominie introduced Latin words in the grace. Many a basin of barley broth and bit of barley bread Mary had eaten in the Schoolhouse ; many a map she had drawn, and copy and sampler—sampler carefully executed by a gentle scholar under Mrs. Macdonnel's superintendence, with a monument, a cypress-tree, and a motto—Mary had examined, seated out on one of the grey rocks among the aromatic junipers. Many a little garment she had fabricated for a young Macdonnel, to whom to go shoeless and stockingless was of course no penance, only there seemed occasional danger that he would also need to dispense with a philabeg.

In return, Mrs. Macdonnel was devoted to Mary Aldour, and would literally have coveted an opportunity to prove by a great effort and a grave sacrifice the completeness of her clan loyalty—above all, how she loved and honoured Mary Aldour.

Mrs. Macdonnel often served Mary as an unceremonious chaperon, and perfectly respectable matron, on occasions when such a friend could scarcely be dispensed with, and when Mary's mother's withdrawal from society would have incommoded the family at Aldour—at the chapel of Choillean, at the rousps which sometimes lasted a day and sometimes a week, at a bachelor's housewarming, when such an unfortunate, ill-furnished person had a call to issue hospitality to his neighbours. Mary was always very indulgent to her, and stoutly insisted on her being a

lady, and kept up all the rights and titles of cousinship, and saw that they were attended to by others, though Mrs. Macdonnel had only been a tacksman's daughter, and was no more than a schoolmaster's wife.

Mrs. Macdonnel on her part was delighted to exchange her narrow board, and clamorous brood, and engrossed spouse, whom she yet catered for most commendably, for light, and space, and ease, and abundance, and the genteel world, and was at this time engaged to accompany Mary and Anne and partake of the collation at Dunglas.

Mrs. Macdonnel was always seeking private conferences with Mary, so that the latter was not struck with anything mysterious in the present beckoning of her friend, in her faded Joseph, with her battered rustic straw hat shading her plain but lively face and prematurely grey hair, only partially concealed with her false curls, till Mrs. Macdonnel carefully closed the glass door of communication, and led Mary through the hall, where three of the girls were spinning, into the honeysuckle porch. Still Mary could look back through the glass door at Anne Macdonald submissively pursuing her needlework—Anne in her lawn gown and mode cloak, with those lines in her delicately shaped and tinted face, and slender figure, which were so affluent with sweetness, perceptible even in the distance and through the thick, coarse glass.

'Don't disturb yourself, Mary, but I want to say something to you. Are you aware that the Robert-

sons of Croclune are to be along with us at Dunglas the day after to-morrow ?

Mary was very much provoked. This call at Dunglas to see the poor old head of the house had seemed an important act to her. Anne had been reluctant to perform it, lest it should subject her to an accusation of forwardness ; Aldour had wanted the horses and Farquhar to go with a string of the other servants for peats ; Mrs. Macdonnel had not chosen that the girls should ride without Farquhar ; and altogether Mary had met with considerable difficulty in bringing them all to the point of agreeing to John Dunglas's pressing supplication. Now, to be thus lightly treated, to have what she had reckoned next to a solemnity profaned by the Robertsons' presence, to find this unacceptable addition made to their party without so much as consulting them, as a crowning evidence of John Dunglas's obtuseness or recklessness, was little short of a wanton insult. Thus meditating angrily, Mary looked back again, and compared Anne in her lawn and mode, with her graceful repose and her intelligent application, to Nancy, with her torn, tawdry skirts, her empty head, her unbridled neck, her clumsy, violent hands ; and Mary could not resist tossing her own head very expressively.

Mrs. Macdonnel was quite in her element ; she had aroused somebody, and she had been of service to Mary Aldour. But Mary, with all her penchant for Mrs. Macdonnel of the Schoolhouse, was not inclined to gossip with her on what affected Anne so nearly.

Besides, the story might not be true. Mrs. Macdonnel was too eager a collector of news to be very careful of their authenticity.

'Pray, my dear Mackie,' observed Mary, addressing her by a homely but affectionate by-name, 'have you had a communication from John Dun-glas ?'

'Oh ! no, Mary, of course not, when he had not apprised the House. I heard it in a very simple way, but I can assure you it is a fact. Barbara Dairy, of Croclune, was crossing the ford not two hours ago, and called in at the Schoolhouse to get Macdonnel to read a letter from Roban Dhu, up in the birkwood ; think of Macdonnel being summoned from his books (he has got a new one, Prideaux's "Connexion," have you seen it, Mary ?) to be tormented with servant girl's letters. But he complies, for it is his duty ; and since Barbara's little brother Hector is in the school, I asked Barbara into the parlour to have a glass of cowslip wine and a bit of white bread, which is a treat to Barbara still, though she has been a year and a half in a great house. And says I, in the Gaelic, "You'll all be thinking of nothing but marriages at Croclune now that Miss Flory's match is established ?" and answers she with her bob of a curtsey, for she's a civil girl, Barbara, "I'm not so clear of that, Mrs. Macdonnel ; the young Captain's just very careless ; I'm thinking he has been too sure of his bargaiu ; and it's little courting he gives our Miss Flory now that he is restored to her, unless to laugh at her and to cry, 'Flory,

'bring me this,' 'Flory, get me that,' 'Flory, give me your purse;' he has learned that soon enough. I don't believe Miss Flory will stand it long; myself would not bear it from the boy Roban Dhu. But I reckon we're soon to have a likelier wedding at Croclune—that of young Dunglas and Miss Nancy.'

"I can tell you that you are wrong there, Barbara; I have reason to know that will never be a marriage," I answered, pretty smartly.'

"Oh ! Mackie, why did you say so ?"

"Oh ! I mentioned no names, Mary. It might have been one of his cousins—the Lettach girls, or Isabella Tobercairn, for aught that Barbara could tell. Of course Barbara deferred to me, but although she did not like to contradict me, I could see she kept her own mind. "With your leave, Mrs. Macdonnel, the swallow comes before the summer, and the clover before the corn. John Dunglas was not only at the grand party last night running about with Miss Nancy, and stealing her knot of ribands, and giving her his rose, which she has up in a cracked tumbler in her room, but he is there now, and Miss Nancy and he are catching his sheltie, that she may convoy him so far home; and they are all going over to Dunglas to wait upon Dunglas's sell to-morrow, for that is the reason that I am sent to Nancy of the Fauldfield, who gets the boxes from the Inverluig carrier, to see if ours is there. Miss Nancy ran into the hall to say, 'I must have my plumes, Barbara, to shine at Dunglas to-morrow, and if they have not come in the regular way, I don't care

though I walk every mile to Inverluig and back again to fetch them, for of all the days in the year I will wear them to-morrow ;' and troth ! it's herself would not mind such a tramp if her strength would hold out, when it is to be busked before her lover." But only think what a pert goose, Mary !'

' Oh ! I can't think about her, Mackie,' exclaimed Mary. ' John Dunglas can invite whom he pleases, and it does not signify much to us, after all, for I am not half sure that we will be there ; the weather, and the peats, and we did not count on a crowd of people,' concluded Mary, huddling together her objections to hide their flimsiness.

' Is there any chance of your not going, Mary ?' exclaimed Mrs. Macdonnel, her face lengthening piteously. ' Dear ! dear ! and I had sponged my silk again, and made up my commode, and I flattered myself they looked very tolerable ; no use in asking Macdonnel's opinion, his mind is all for verbs and roots of words. But don't you think I had better go without you ? it would look odd if we all sent apologies. And then I would be some check upon them ; they will be so mighty giddy and full of themselves, they will quite worry Dunglas—honest man, and he an old friend—that is, we used to see each other regularly at the church and the rousps, and I remember meeting him at your christening, Mary Aldour, and he declared it was a lass for his boy. But we can't look before us, not though we're lairds and chiefs born and bred—not unless we've gotten the sore gift. I have been looking forward to

a chat by his easy chair. And do you know I should not wonder but John Dunglas is depending upon me to be the lady to preside over the refreshments ? Jenny Mackinnon is a goodsoul and a decentbody, and I know she is allied to Dunglas, but she does not sit down at the table with them, unless when John Dunglas takes his tea in the housekeeper's room, which they tell me he does many a time for dearth of company. He could never abide his book, which is not to be wondered at in such a pretty young man ; but Macdonnel knows it to his cost, for you remember, Mary, John Dunglas used to come to him as your Malcolm goes to Mr. Cormac Macgregor—and we find no fault, none in the world, dear, we are well aware there is not such a scholar between Stornoway and Aberdeen as Mr. Cormac, and he is so attached to the family, as he may well be, a glen's man himself, and he is very friendly with Macdonnel, and comes over once a week to yoke to an argument with him, for you may depend upon it they differ, as doctors will do, Mary Aldour, but he is very free with the reads of his books and his papers. I must say, like yourself, and Macdonnel says you're free as the sunshine, Mary. But oh ! about the collation at Dunglas, Mary. I suppose Flory Robertson will not undertake it, and she no better than a bride, though it is not so formidable as a dinner, only wine, and cakes, and pasties, and cured meats, and cold fowls, and they had three Stilton cheeses from Inverluig with Donald carrier last Tuesday.'

'Oh ! do you go, by all means, Mackie, and keep them in order, and enjoy yourself as well as you can without us.' Mary gave her permission, shaking hands, glad to see Macdonnel trotting up on the venerable family nag, and to look on while Mrs. Macdonnel, availing herself of 'the loupeng-on stane,' duly set without the porch of Aldour, mounted to the pillion—another Dulcibella—and the worthy couple rode away down the glen very lovingly.

Mary was not without an idea, 'Mackie will observe and comment on everything ; and if we do not go, as I believe we shall not now, we will still have a report of the proceedings.' Notwithstanding, Mary half regretted that Mrs. Macdonnel had informed them of the intended inroad at Dunglas. 'If we had not known, we might still have gone, and things might have come right somehow, in spite of John Dunglas's infatuation. But now, with the expectation of Maclean's odious patronage of Anne, and Flora's malice, and Nancy's making eyes at John Dunglas, it is out of the question. And John Dunglas to draw it all down on us himself. I will never trust a lad again. I hope he will be sorry for what he has done. And how happy we were, not a week ago ! They are all alike, the men—so stupid, so weak, so inconstant ; all but my father and the boys. Yet now I am not just to the other men in Aldour, I think they are a little steadier and manlier than the rest of the world. I would not be justifiable in withholding this circumstance from Anne. I should not thank any one who

deceived me on such a point! Heigho! how will it all end, and how could I ever think John Dunglas superior to Anne?

'I have heard the Robertsons are to be at Dunglas to-morrow, Anne,' Mary said cautiously in an undertone to Anne, as they left the tea-table, and looking another way as she spoke.

Anne stopped short in her passage to the window, but she only allowed herself to reply, 'Indeed! Are they?' A long time after, quite in the misty gloaming which threw so picturesque a veil over Loch Aldour and Ben Falloch, Anne renewed the conversation, speaking very low, lest she should disturb Mrs. Macdonnel singing a lullaby to Annie, and almost repeating Mary's words—'John Dunglas can ask what company he pleases to Dunglas.'

'Of course; it is entirely his own affair. And I want to say to you, Anne, that you have given no foundation for this act; no deed of yours occasioned it. I mean John Dunglas was too gracious to the Robertsons before, and he has only got entangled with them again.'

'Perhaps; but, Mary, should we submit to visit Dunglas as it is?' Anne's eyes were dim, and there was anguish in her voice, but she was composed and firm.

'I will do what you like, Anne; I should wish you to decide for yourself, I can rely upon you, dear, so perfectly.'

Doubtless Anne was a little comforted by Mary

Aldour's full respect and confidence, which she had not always possessed to this extent.

'It does not do to be too lofty-minded,' hesitated Mary. 'It is best to be kind and charitable always. Whatever passive course is chalked out for a woman, it is certainly sometimes allowable to demand an explanation.'

'I could not, Mary; I never could.'

'No; you would suffer and die in silence. Yours is too fine a nature for his; you are a great deal too good for him.'

'Oh! don't say that, Mary; I can bear anything but that. Would you have gone to Dunglas, Mary?'

'No,' Mary was forced to admit.

'What would your mother say?'

'I believe she considers girls should judge for themselves, if possible. She would be happy to give you her advice if you asked it, but I think I have said the substance of it.'

'Very well, Mary; we will stay at home; that is fixed.'

Mary wrote a note for Mrs. Macdonnel of the Schoolhouse to convey to John Dunglas, and it is to be feared if she could have stuck it full of the blades of penknives and tiny lances, she would have been tempted to do it. She trusted its short eloquence—its cold repetition of the showery weather, the peats, the approaching harvest, the unexpected necessity of preparing to meet a party—would smite him, and that he would be punished, and terrified,

and recalled to his senses. But she feared that John Dunglas was compromising himself fatally ; that he was losing a treasure like a madman, knowing not wherefore. Well, poor Anne would not have much to regret probably ; but oh ! to think that Anne should come North—a Macdonnel among the Macdonnels—to receive this heart-thrust in Aldour.

But John Dunglas might appear yet with apology, remonstrance, repentance ; and so the next day was rendered bitter with the exceeding bitterness of faint expectation, and sickening hope deferred, and blasting disappointment ; and it was a fine day after the late rains, and in reality the starting day of the corn-cutting in Aldour, when the air was fresh, and the sky blue, and the hills flecked with the richest brown and green, seen too near to promise a continuance of dry weather, so you may make the most of such a one when the grain and the bushes have rustled themselves dry, and the whole air is full of the murmur of rills ‘ singing’ to the lochan, and a waterfall such as Mary’s Spout Bahn is a brawling torrent, roaring like thunder, and foaming like the sea.

Among the prettiest things on a Highland estate are the corn-fields, scooped, and niched, and hung in the centre of the rocks, the wood, and the heather. They are apt to be overlooked, but when they are found they are charming. They rarely occur in clusters, except when they are meadows by the loch or the river. On the uplands they are single, queerly-shaped, and uniformly fringed with bracken, hazel, and alder

bushes, and often a wealth of flowers—such a mass of red roses, blue wild geranium, ivory meadowsweet, lilac scabious, yellow Lady's bedstraw, and delicate white vetches, as are presented in few situations besides the sunny boundary of a lonely Highland field. These fields turn up in the oddest situations, and require the most peculiar husbandry, not very profitable to agriculturists. You find them over your head, under your feet, in the bend of the hill, on the steep slope—every place but on the summit of the mountains. If they are pretty at all times, they are especially pretty supplied with animated life—primitive Highland lassies, most unconsciously busy and graceful, in Mary's days all with the tartan petticoat, striped jacket, and snooded hair; old wives with their foreheads bound by the fillets of their curches, and over them their plaid screens; strong, supple men, rebelling against the Government order of the trews, and shearing at least, in kilts; sunburnt little children, all petti-coated—the boys with the little laced boddices, the girls with the square of tartan, fastened by a skewer beneath ‘their dimpled chins’—sedate matrons in anticipation; little carts and little horses, which yet bore heavy loads of brown peats, or green broom, or golden corn, and came and departed, they only knew how.

No wonder all classes and ages loved to frequent these fields. And when Alister, the piper, and the feuars of Aldour met at noon before the house to begin the deferred duty of cutting the Laird's corn, and set off to the full blare and screech of the

pipes, accompanied by Aldour, to the ripest patch, Mary and Anne soon followed, under the pretext of carrying a drink with their own hands to Aldour—a drink borne in triumph in his silver tankard to the barley field among the firs. Mary had beguiled away Anne, for self-contained, with true worth and dignity, as Anne showed herself, the poor soul could not help wandering out in the clear light and sitting like a ghost in the boat by the loch, or on the moor, and glancing ever nervously up and down the road and over the hill-tracks.

Aldour took off his bonnet and drank the first draught to their service, and to the success of the shearing, and then transferred the tankard to Mary, who nodded, and wished them a good harvest, tasted the liquor, and passed it on to Anne to perform the same ceremony ; and then it went round and round to every man, woman, and child on the field, that all might exchange grave expressions of good-will, and express earnest desire for the common prosperity of the chief. The process might be nearly the same as when the refreshment was yet ruder and stronger, and the vessel that contained it a great shell from the Western shores.

The work had not begun. Aldour and his people, with the deliberation of the race, were only contemplating the corn as yet. Mary accepted a hook, and, amidst the most serious and admiring attention, cut the first handful of grain—a ragged, irregular handful, in spite of Mary's cleverness, and presented it to the

oldest and trustiest bandster, and then committed her instrument unerringly to the best shearer in Aldour. The last distinction caused the woman, though a toil-worn, care-burdened mother of a family, to blush like a girl, and break out into a blessing—‘*May roses grow under your footsteps, Mary Aldour!*’

‘It is your due, Betty,’ observed Mary, rather shortly.

‘Yes, Mary Aldour,’ the woman granted, but hanging her head. ‘And your father’s daughter owned it, though I crossed you about the hand-mill.’

‘I don’t dispute your right to judge for yourself, Betty; I only offer you my counsel, and I have a call to advise you to try new plans, as my father is right to enjoin you to introduce turnips as winter feeding for the cattle.’

Other heads than Betty’s might have bent, for this novelty of Aldour’s, like every other novelty in a kingdom, was encountering stubborn opposition in the glen. But Mary’s subjects did not fear to reply to her.

‘We like your father too well, Mary Aldour; we are too jealous of the Laird’s honour to have him supporting new-fangled ways.’

‘If you love us you should trust us, Ranald,’ declared Mary, stoutly, while Aldour tapped his snuff-mill approvingly; ‘and if we err when we mean to improve your condition and our own, we will confess our mistake and try again.’

‘We believe you, Mary Aldour,’ the Highlander

averred with dignity. ‘Never a clansman was harried by the Laird ; nay, never a clout has been lifted out of Aldour by a Macdonnel since old Eneas Dhu lived, before the campaigns of Montrose ; we all know the difference between Aldour and Finralia.’ And the whole field uttered an energetic assent.

Opposite the barley field, which was grown among the strips of the fir plantation, lay the height from which the stream that formed the Spout Bahn plunged down, to form again into a clear, rapid little river, and rush to the loch ; and between the hills of the leap of the Spout Bahn and the Firs, was a deep hollow, issuing from the very crest of the acclivity, running parallel to the waterfall, and intersected by a bridle-road, so precipitous and heavily rutted that it was as much as a man’s life was worth to attempt it at anything beyond a foot pace, and even then the sure-footedness and temper of the best horse were hard tried. Aldour declared more mares and fillies had stumbled with him creeping up or down the Spout Bahn road, than had ever failed him in the wildest gallop on the high road.

As Mary and Anne watched the corn-cutting, and set a-going the little gleaners, a hollow sound, half a mile off, caused even the workers to pause, and listen, and look at each other. Some one riding fast and faster down the road by the Spout Bahn—some one a-weary of his life. Who could be so mad ? For the doctrine of equilibrium preserved by rapid progress was not yet afloat.

For a few minutes the field listened intently and with arrested breath. At last Mary broke the spell. ‘He is at the foot now, the tread is lost in the heather ; he has not broken his neck this time. Come away, Anne ; my father must call him to account, and I don’t care to hear the scold, though he deserves it, child. The fiends must have been after that man.’ And Anne and she sauntered homewards. When they had turned round two intervening shoulders of rock, they had a parting glimpse of the barley-field, and there was a horse’s head appearing at the gap, but the rider did not tarry for the censure, he left by the opposite stile almost as soon as they had observed him.

Back at the house, and after Aldour’s return for the evening, the girls learnt two things of which they had not a very lively suspicion, and which, like much knowledge, came too late. John Dunglas had called at the house in their absence, in a great hurry, and would not wait a moment ; it seemed as if he had wanted to avoid them, and yet he had changed his mind and made a desperate effort to reach them from the top of the Spout Bahn when he had detected their hats among the bare heads and white caps of the women in the barley-field at the Firs ; and so he had spurred his ill-used beast, and wagered his unfairly-dealt-with body, merely to look in at the barley-field and find them gone, and possibly suppose, in his thorough dissatisfaction and miserable rage, that they had anticipated his coming and run away from him, merely that he might be foiled a second time for good or for ill.

Mary did not wonder that Anne's head ached badly all next day, and that to her Anne could not conceal that she was deeply hurt and cruelly grieved. But Mary could never cease to admire the decency of Anne's reticence to the world in general, the firmness of her silence, and her pale, smiling dignity, the meekness of her cloak of ordinary habits and customs, and even especial ingenuity and cheerfulness with the children.

It was a different world then—at once simpler and more formal. Women did not proclaim their disbelief in heart and mind, and boast their invulnerability to both common and uncommon feeling, unless, indeed, in their writing flights. They were not so volatile, so worldly, so insincere, so ashamed of the truth—and at the same time they had often a much more difficult task to perform. They had not a like liberty and independence ; they were called upon to be courteous, clever, deferential, and also authoritative in the family circle ; and they could by no means absent themselves from it, and absorb themselves in their own pursuits, and take refuge in being solitary and superior, free, and lovers of nature and art, as they do now-a-days. Girls must keep the house, and sew fine needlework, and entertain visitors, and establish characters for being sweet, or dignified women at all costs.

Anne was at once dignified and sweet, and Mary was tempted to exalt her into an angel indeed, and to be more and more ashamed of having ever decried

her, and more and more earnest, and wistful, and resolute to spare her as the shining hours rolled on, and still Anne worked, and listened, and cut paper flowers in paper flower-pots for Annie, and recited pieces to Niel. At last—at last, it was evening. Come what might this must be the worst day, and there was only the game at fox-and-goose with Aldour, whom Mary had contrived to put off about their change of mind, as about the incidents of the party at Croclune ; and then the day was ended, and the long night with its agonies was at least sacred to darkness and solitude—these were often boons to our progenitors.

Mary was calculating that she would see Mrs. Macdonnel at the Schoolhouse to-morrow, and hear what was likely to be disagreeable news, when, to her surprise, again her indefatigable satellite knocked at the glass door and protested that it was such a beautiful moonlight that she had been tempted, after being set down by the Croclune car from Dunglas, to stroll up the half mile by the loch side, but she could not wait a moment or tell a bit of news, except that she had found old Dunglas, honest man, well, objecting to his last supply of snuff; and the repast excellent, very creditable to his housekeeper, Jenny Mackinnon, though she was a conceited body ; John Dunglas had been most attentive to his guests, and the Robertsons had been very finely dressed, Miss Flory, or rather Mrs. Maclean, in a Pompadour gown. That was all ; she could not wait another moment ; Macdonnel would be angry, on account of that fray of the gauger,

though she must say neither smugglers nor disbanded sailors bore her any ill-will. But would Mary accompany her a little way home, just to enjoy the moonlight?

Mary saw there was something of moment in the wind, and took her little hat, always at hand, and Malcolm's plaid, and sent on Malcolm to scour the road with his terriers and otter-hounds, always lying about the hall. (Her father, annoyed at the interruption, ironically recommended Mary to unchain Bran, and take out Farquhar and Sandy for a body-guard, lest she should encounter the smugglers.) Mary long remembered that moonlight walk, though she had cause to remember others still more sober, still more full of distress and unhappiness. The contrast between the grand, solemn scene, the hills and the lochin their bosom under their gigantic shadows, the white moonlight, and the incongruous actors, and this cross so petty in its elements and yet so malignant, so full of fretting care and pain. Mrs. Macdonnel still wore her sponged silk and her roquelaure, and dressed set of curls. Poverty effected curious transformations on Mrs. Macdonnel. The Dominie's fees only afforded her meat and malt, clothes, and a house to shelter herself and her family, and the laborious, but money cheap preservation of her ancient silk, her roquelaure, and her gauze head-dress. In the expensive article of false hair, then an indispensable matter in a matron's toilette, Mrs. Macdonnel often said she did not know what she would have done if she had not been furnished with a supply by

the bequests of two deceased friends. But unfortunately for the unity of Mrs. Macdonnel's appearance and the clearness of the world's opinion on her complexion, the bountiful defuncts had been themselves respectively dark, and fair, so that the heiress of their hair showed herself familiarly in flat coal-black curls, among which her own grey locks obstinately strayed, and on holidays and festivals in screws and bows of rusty auburn, of much ampler and more satisfactory magnitude. But, as Mary said, there was no great confusion, for one could never mistake Mackie's dear plain, kindly face.

Mrs. Macdonnel's fronts were now quite clammy with agitation, as she could scarcely wait until Malcolm had preceded them to see if the dogs would seek out any water-rats, to exclaim, 'Mary, John Dunglas is undone.'

'Take time to tell your story, Mackie,' entreated Mary with doleful prudence; 'compose yourself. If you faint out here in the moonlight, when I have not my drops in my pocket, Malcolm and I may not be able to recover you, though to be sure we have an abundance of water at hand.'

'Nonsense, child,' protested Mrs. Macdonnel, a little huffy at being interrupted and thus called to order, though Mary could have told her it was a pretence to gain a little time in order to compose herself. 'I know better than to be put about. Well, we went, Mary, as we proposed, but without you, and I can tell you John Dunglas looked aghast and wretched when he

had your note. He said something about your being offended at his want of ceremony, and that you might have forgiven him ; you might be sorry yet that you had not forgiven him ; but I don't know if he meant it to be turned over again. Then he had to attend to the Robertsons, and they were in full force. Really, Mary, I thought them very disagreeable ; that Maclean finding fault with the Highlands, he a Highlander born ! 'Deed, the Highlands are black ashamed of such a son, comparing them disparagingly to foreign parts and great cities, as if we wanted the Country to change its fashions, and be other than it is. And Flory, own wife to him, setting me down and inquiring the number of Macdonnel's scholars, and wondering how I could get out during the day ; and Nancy laughing outright in my face, though I believe the child is nothing near the sister for mischief. But to my mind, the old Captain is the only person among them who possesses either parts or politeness.

'But of course I did not mind them. I kept by old Dunglas. I cannot say he was very diverting company, for he is getting quite stupid, poor man ; but I looked about me and saw what new furniture they had got to the house since I was through it thirty years ago, and I think, Mary, they must have got the stained wood chairs, as well as the Indian-tree cabinet ; and I tried to do justice to the good things after Jenny Mackinnon had taken so much trouble to prepare them for us. But oh ! Mary, it would have

gone to your heart to hear the old man struggling to get out something on his mind ; every moment knocking on the ground with his stick and bidding John Dunglas bring him the young lady. I declare I thought the anxiety would do him harm. You see, Mary, he had been prepared in some sort to receive Miss Anne Macdonald, and John Dunglas was not able to put it out of his head and pacify him. At last, when John Dunglas was wearied out, I suppose, he was so far left to himself as to say, "Here is a young lady come to see you, father," and he took forward Nancy Robertson, and the poor old man shook her hand and said, "God bless you, my dear," and she giggled ; actually that hussie Nancy Robertson giggled. Old Dunglas was not so childish though, that he did not perceive there was some deception practised upon him, and every now and then he woke up and recognised the Robertsons, and asked John Dunglas impatiently—he was always a fast-tempered man, Dunglas—what had become of the Aldour family, *his* friends—he laid stress on the words, *his* friends—and where was Miss Anne Macdonald ? Then John Dunglas burst out as fierily as his father, "Oh ! Dunglas, can you not content yourself with a substitute ? What although there has been a niffer ? I tell you that you must content yourself with a substitute, if I am pleased." I looked hard at him when he said that, but he would not meet my eye ; afterwards he was more like a man who had been tasting at a dergie, from morning till night, than a man in his

sober senses, though he was perfectly fresh as far as I could discover. And he went such a length as to put Nancy at the tray and make her preside, and the girl did it, and I sitting at the side, not to speak of her poor silly mother and Miss Flory, who pretended to be amused, and smiled when the others laughed, and said to me, "A man must be excused sometimes for breaking rules. What do you think, Mrs. Macdonnel?" She was quite gracious now, when I thought them barely respectable, for all their pride, after such a breach of propriety, Mary; heard you ever the like of it? And Nancy mixed Dunglas his Athole brose, and had the face to carry it round to the old man, and present it to him with her own hand; and you know Dunglas, honest man, was always a slave to his cup and his platter, and he was so well refreshed and had his palate so tickled, that though he recognised her fairly this time, he could not resist clapping her on the shoulder and crying out, "You are a strapping lass, Miss Nancy; no wonder you turn a lad's head, though I was persuaded it was otherwise. Yes, Captain Robertson, I tell you frankly I had different information." And the Captain just rubbed his hands and replied, "I make every allowance for your friendship in another quarter, Dunglas; I don't want to enter into any family arrangement here; let sleeping dogs lie. I only assert you will find me quite as ready to keep my own as to bestow them on those who covet them. Come, no more of this, Dunglas; let us be hearty at your board." I vow, Mary, I

thought of old blind Isaac and his venison, and I could have dropped.

‘ Of course, after that, John Dunglas was wilder and more reckless than before, and they were such a forward, noisy party, in spite of Miss Flory’s primness, that I had two or three times to apologize for them to Jenny Mackinnon, who must have been mighty glad to see our backs turned. Dunglas was sleeping like a top before we went ; and John Dunglas came home with us in the car, sitting close by Nancy, like a shepherd and a dairymaid. You may trust me, Mary Aldour, that he has committed himself to such a degree that no man of honour could draw back. No family would put his conduct aside and overlook it, far less an unscrupulous, grasping race like the Robertsons of Croclune. As it might be the last opportunity of getting at him, I consented to leave the horse, and come back in the Croclune car, and I said to John Dunglas when he leapt out to lift me down, for that coxcomb Maclean looked at the moon and hummed an English tune and never moved, “ John Dunglas, I hope you will never rue this day ; ” and he wrung my hand and answered like a man possessed, “ I will take my share of the day on myself, Mrs. Macdonnel ; I hope no other person may repent of their part in it.” ’

‘ It is done,’ said Mary ; ‘ and it does not comport with our honour that we should say anything against it. Remember, Mackie.’

‘ Yes, Mary, don’t you think I understand ? I will

never breathe a whisper of it ; I will put down all gossip as far as I can ; I will be up to inquire for the poor dear girl to-morrow. Do get her to drink goat's milk, and eat a slice of mutton-ham to breakfast, and a well-done bit of roast mutton to dinner every day.'

When Mary returned to the parlour, she was so white that Aldour guessed she had seen the ghost of the unhappy Perth lady who was carried north by grim Eneas Dhu—the only Aldour within the memory of man who took after the Finralias—and who pined into madness before her ransom could be paid down, and leapt into the blue depths of the loch, and was free from violence and oppression for evermore.

And at the remark, the blood left Anne's cheeks in sympathy, so that Mrs. Macdonnel hurried them both to bed as silly young women, who had wandered about and tired themselves, and probably got wet feet, and were in the prospect of colds to the bargain.

Once in the little old-fashioned room—black and white in ebony and dimity, and always with heather about the mirror, and hawthorn and wild roses, or bog myrtle and scarlet hips and haws in the sweet-pot—Mary began to cry, and flung her arms round Anne's neck, and kissed her, and begged her pardon as if she had been the real offender, and said plainly, 'John Dunglas is unworthy of you, Anne ; you must think no more of him.'

Anne bore it wonderfully, remaining quiet and tear-

less ; not firing up, for she was a gentle girl ; but not breaking down into frantic outcry or feeble and wicked despair ; and so a foolish fellow like John Dunglas might still have supposed that she did not care for him. But the girl had a stricken look. Yet, as Mary still hung about her, protesting that she wished Anne had never come among them to be so basely used, she would that she could take Anne's sorrow upon herself, for she believed that then there would but be a great blaze, which would extinguish every grain of regard, and so the connexion would be summarily ended, Anne roused herself.

'No, Mary, all must be for the best, depend upon it.'

'I call that true piety, my dear love, and I hope it will ease and comfort you.'

'I think it will, Mary ; I believe it will; and I hope I will not trouble anybody.'

'To think that John Dunglas could have done this ! that he has let Anne Macdonald slip through his fingers and clutched at Nancy Robertson ! He will be punished.'

'Oh ! hush, Mary ; you must not condemn him. It is not our part to condemn those who have been unintentionally—yes, unintentionally—our enemies ; and I am sure that girl is fond of him ; I could not have been at peace about that girl. And, Mary, don't desire that the load on my back were lifted and laid upon yours ; you will have your own troubles, my dear friend ; and remember Addison's "Mountain of

Miseries"—the favourite allegory of yours which we read lately, and how human afflictions were increased when they were all mingled and tumbled from one pair of aching shoulders to another, where they did not sit so easily after all. Let us speak no more about it, Mary ; let us think how little we deserve, and say our prayers, and kiss each other, and aim at going to sleep like good girls, and all will come right again in this world—or in the next.'

'Amen,' Mary answered as to a prayer.





CHAPTER XI.

'AND WHO BUT MY FINE FICKLE LOVER STOOD
THERE?'

HERE was no more need, or possibility of concealment where the family was concerned. John Dunglas had broken with Anne Macdonald, and Anne Macdonald with John Dunglas. He had been trifling, or he had altered his mind, or had other engagements, and Anne could not stand his treatment. It was idle to pretend that she was the person to blame ; even he could not be so grossly insulting as to affect to impute Maclean's levity to the lady who suffered from it. It had merely served as the pretext for his withdrawal. So the world of the Country said ; so folk who were not intimately acquainted with John Dunglas's disposition agreed ; so even some of those who might have known him were tempted to conclude in their bitterness ; the provocation was so preposterous, the retribution so hasty and extreme—as if anything could be too preposterous for a passionate and excitable young man—as if anything could

be too impulsive for the rebound of his faith and regard !

John Dunglas would come no more to Aldour while Anne Macdonald was the cherished guest of the house in the glen ; John Dunglas would never more come to Aldour as he had done.

Mary had expected her father to be furious, to vow, ‘I’ll trounce the fellow, Mary ; I’ll have him out. What am I a man for ? My cousin, the sweetest girl in the Highlands and Lowlands, setting aside her penny, the unconscionable villain ! What are people to think of her ?’

‘Good people will think none the worse of her, father ; they will say, better he should jilt her than that she should jilt him—or else their faith must be sadly astray. Did not Socrates remind his wife, bewailing his innocence, “Would you have had me die guilty ?” We will build confidently on dear Anne’s innocence. He is not deserving your chastisement, and the days are past when sword and pistols could amend a wrong. You forget, father, the Highlanders are disarmed ; the Laird of Culrossie could not now fight for the superiority of Aberdeen butter. Ay, laugh, father ; Anne would rather have that than any explosion of your righteous anger. Anne’s heart may be broken already, but it would kill her at our feet if you took the case in hand, and called John Dunglas to account.’

Mary had thought when his first expression of wrath was borne down, that it would pass momentarily like

many another; that in half a day Aldour would snap his fingers and protest that Anne was well quit of the fellow, she would get a hundred better the first summer day, only he was sorry that his old friend Dunglas had such a scapegrace of a son and heir. But no; Aldour was perturbed as well as incensed by the turn in the fortunes of his cousin; it seemed to take hold of his big heart. Many a sigh it cost him; many a gloomy walk up and down the parlour and the hall he took, as if revolving in amazement and consternation the degeneracy of the Highlanders and the impending ruin of the Country and its countrymen. ‘It is not the Country that it was when I was young,’ he lamented. ‘A man cannot spend his own, or borrow his neighbour’s, or lick his enemy as he was wont to do. I wonder what we’re coming to, Mally? I’ve half a mind to give up the glen to Charlie, and go to the backwoods with the rest of them.’ But this was Aldour labouring under a fit of despondency.

Mary could better understand her mother.

Mrs. Macdonnel had only noticed Anne in a general, though motherly way. She had no time for young favourites; she had but a small space in her heart for a stranger heiress cousin; she had merely smiled at John Dunglas’s wooing; she was no match-maker, busy in idleness. But now everything was changed; Anne was in trouble, and Mrs. Macdonnel took her to her heart; she vied with Mary herself in the strength and tenderness of her friendship; she left little Anne crooning on her stool, to walk with big Anne on the hills;

she trusted the maid servants with the drying of the great cheese, to hear Anne read her favourite extracts to her ; she deserted the household wheels for the cushion and bobbins, with which she too had flirted in her nonage, and with which she could still beat Mary and Anne at her old fine scollops and dead and light masses—like a great Dutch painter of lace collars and cuffs. If she did not apportion the slice of mutton-ham, and the bit of roast mutton, and the goat's milk and sack whey, as her namesake, Mrs. Macdonnel of the Schoolhouse, had recommended betimes in the business, she watched the girl's rest and food ; she coaxed her appetite, she lulled her to sleep, she nursed her under her blow as she nursed lame Niel and little Annie. Even in the grey summer night Anne shut her wide-open eyes at the sound of the firm but soft foot grown so familiar, and through the nearly closed lids saw Mrs. Macdonnel's tall, large figure like an extensive ghost in her night-dress and mantle, and heard Mary murmur sleepily, ‘Is that you, mother ? Is there anything the matter ? You need not be stirring.’ And the response, ‘Hush ! child, I only wanted to see that you were all lying still. Don’t let me disturb you.’ And never the most distant allusion to the cause of the care. Mrs. Macdonnel would have died before she had intruded into Anne’s confidence, or enticed her into sickly sentimentalism and mawkish confession. But how that woman despised John Dun-glas.

‘Mary,’ whispered Anne, after a nocturnal visitation,

'I did not know that your mother was so good. What a blessed thing it is to have such a mother; I shall be grateful for her to the end of my existence, though I am but an adopted child. I have read of a brother born for adversity, Mary; this is a mother born for sorrow.'

'Yes,' Mary answered with honest pride, 'my mother is good; she is not a soft woman, but she is as true as steel.'

There is an alloy of pride in such a nature, but it is a noble nature nevertheless. All honour to the hearts that bear as their shield the ivy clinging round the ruin, with the motto, 'In adversity faithful.'

Let us hum perseveringly the old Scotch song,

Here's to the friend we can trust,
When the blasts of adversity blow;

let us learn by heart the English lines,

When lone and neglected, oh! my love will be
Like the moss to the stone—like the vine to the tree;

and God bless us if we practise them.

But Mary had now to acquire a vivid experience of the plague of popularity. Had the Aldour family been a single family, an obscure group in a street full of foreigners to each other, then no man, or more properly woman, would have intermeddled with their sorrow; but, as it was, Anne Macdonald's love affair, and how it had gone off, was patent to the whole glen, and bodach and cailliach, lad and lass, were overflowing with sympathy. These simple imaginative High-

landers had an especial hunger and thirst for a love affair, and they were the last people on record who believed implicitly in the hard death—dying for love.

The fellow-feeling was certainly very delicately expressed, but Mary would often shrug her shoulders forcibly, and retreat rapidly from its utterance. When Mary More offered her herbs, gathered from far and near on the hills, which, no offence to the Lady, surpassed hers, as Mary More's ninety years exceeded Mrs. Macdonnel's forty-five, and there was a distress in the house of Aldour that needed the best of medicine ; when Hector Corrybeg walked five miles with the gift of the very draggled little bullfinch whose song had charmed his poor brother Alister out of his madness when he was slighted by little Cathleen. But most of all, Mary was very indignant and severe when old Sheelas called her into the storeroom, to inform her that she had heard a Dead voice, and that it spoke English.

‘I wonder at you, Sheelas, to conjure up such horrors ; you know that the minister has forbidden you to believe in such superstitions ; do you want to be as wicked as the Witch of Endor ?’

‘Mary Aldour, you did not use to take it so hotly, though you were always hard of belief. I do not like you to be so stouthearted, child.’

‘Never mind me, Sheelas ; I'll take my chance ; I'll trust in my Bible and my prayers. But you're not to hear any more dead voices speaking English. Anne has spilt neither cup of water, nor broken thread

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in spinning that has ever reached my ears, and you are aware that must first happen before you are entitled to hear a Dead voice ; and, Sheelas, I forbid you to dream any bad dreams about my dear Anne Macdonald.'

The public itself was apt to condole with them openly in those partly highflown, partly plain-spoken days. 'I am sorry to hear, Mary Aldour, that John Dunglas has behaved very badly to Miss Anne Macdonald.'

'Oh ! my dear madam, it is no great thing ; at least I believe young men hold such liberties nothing.'

'Why, my dear, they told me that he had paid her every attention, and all but named the day, while the whole time he was carrying on an old connexion with that wild Nancy Robertson.'

'So I have heard, too, Mrs. Maclachlan, but everything we hear is not quite true, and I am happy to say we will get over this.'

Mary's friends thought her proud and reserved, because she did not abuse John Dunglas with all her might.

Anne felt as if a hundred eyes were upon her, and perhaps it did her good, though the scrutiny was very irksome, very oppressive. Anne would try to emulate the heroism of the maiden of old, who danced and danced upon the news of the death of father, mother, brother, sister, lover ; danced through the loss of an entire household ; danced till Death himself was her partner ; danced this moment, and the next lay stark

and still with her kindred and her hopes!—nay, rather, she was come to a better heroism, to that of the old man who, with grander simplicity than that of the Indian chief bowing to the Great Spirit, exclaimed, ‘The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ Yes, He takes our dreams and desires, our hopes and prospects, as well as the bodies of our friends, with whom, while in the body, we do not again hold conscious intercourse; and ‘Blessed be the name of the Lord,’ for ‘the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof’—the fulness of science and art, the fulness of a man’s heart, and the glory of his imagination.

And so Anne Macdonald was hurt. Who would have thought it? Anne, with her elegance and sweetness, her father’s fortune, her own wealth of friends; and the very singularity of the circumstance probably aggravated it. What could John Dunglas propose to himself? What a deluded, half-crazed fellow!—what a pity!—what a shame! And in the half-real, half-affected passion for what was interesting and languishing—for Major André’s old love, and Emmett’s old love, and James Wolfe’s old love, and that poor young lady whose affianced husband was drowned in the last year’s gale which blew great guns at sea—Anne was in danger of being farther subjected to a fresh rush upon her favour both by hypocrites and honest men—fine gentlemen like Maclean, and true, tender-hearted fellows carried away by a breath of romance, such as John Dunglas had been a month ago.

Yet Anne's friends would not have chosen this fate for her ; the sleep that we give our beloved is not like that which our Master bestows on them. Lazy, self-indulgent gratification of their wishes, strong, sweet, human joy often settling and souring on its lees, that is what we would award ; but he often presents a bitter wine, which needs the fennel leaf to render it drinkable.

Anne, with John Dunglas as plastic as herself, would have found life too pleasant and too slippery a progress. Her spiritual nerve and muscle might have relaxed, her *devoir*, like that of the knights of old in the laps of their lady-loves, been forgotten, her truth and steadfastness implanted by grace, have faded away. No, Anne must walk along rude paths, and through barren fields, and against pinching or scorching winds ; and Anne took up her cross gallantly. No more gallant wearing of the appointed load of tried humanity than when the woman carries it silently and surely above the thorn in her poor heart. It is silly, cowardly, or stern, to affect that there are no such thorns ; that they are plucked out, and the bleeding of their wounds stanched in a day, or a year, or a life. ‘Let the woman keep silence before the man,’ it is the law of her womanhood ; but let him ‘who has behaved uncomely to his virgin,’ see to it. He has ‘lied before the Lord’ in stabbing his creature in her natural affections, and though she be but a poor, silly woman, affected possibly, vulgar-mannered, weak-minded, narrow-hearted,

feeble-spirited, unless he repent in dust and ashes, let him see to it.

Beneath even a wicked mother's curse
No living thing can thrive,

wrote the great man in awed, humble acknowledgement of a mother's holiness ; and in old Scotland—earnest, righteous, manly old Scotland, with all its errors—there was a conviction still lingering among its grey heads that a man might commit other sins and go unpunished to his grave ; but that he could not abuse a woman's faith, deliberately or thoughtlessly, without being subjected to God's vengeance even in this life ; his peculiar sin was seen upon him ; it found him out ; it held him up as a by-word and reproach ; his heart was torn and lacerated ; his hearth was rendered desolate ; direct retribution met him before his little day was over.

Anne experienced her best auxiliary in that constant, unobtrusive, patient friend at her elbow—work. 'I do not know what I would have done without work,' says, lightly enough, with only a ring on the words, many a young and many an old woman ; and the clear eye glistens, and a sigh trembles on the breath, that is all. Really the prescription is infallible ; if you will only take enough of the dose, and your frame can stand its effects, it will bring you through. Lucy Robarts, of whom we have most of us read, was quite right in thinking that hard work would have done her saucy nature, rebelling against her, a world

of good ; would have brought it down and scoured it into common sense and rational submission ; the only contradiction is that she need not have been particular about the quality, coarse or fine it will serve the purpose, and it is always at hand, only be sure that you take enough of it. A girl with a clear conscience, a godly spirit, and plenty of work, need not fear dying of love, though she may be scarred with its scars to her dying day.

Anne was never idle, and Mrs. Macdonnel and Mary aided and abetted her with the unfailing round, the unceasing task ; sometimes it was needlework, but then it required to be very elaborate and difficult, and Anne finished her apron and began a veil, rich enough and exquisitely fine enough to have served a bride—to be kept as an heir-loom. Anne never wore that veil ; she never looked at it in after-life without a little shudder ; she could not find it in her heart to bestow it as a pledge of affection on her dearest friend, it seemed so ill-omened a gift.

Sometimes it was joining Mrs. Macdonnel and Mary in the cooking, the pickling, and preserving, still a great adjunct of female life, almost from the castle to the cottage, and in the especial baking and brewing for what should have been this blithe harvest time. But a great deal of it was sheer walking ; hard exercise in the open air ; long excursions to the corn-fields ; to the hill sides, where the broom was drying for thatching ; to the peat moss, from which all the peats were not yet brought in ; to the woods, where the

stacks of bark stood ready for removal ; to the forsaken shielings, from which the train of shepherds and dairy-women, children and cattle, sheep and collies, had long descended ; to the moor with Aldour to see him have an afternoon's shooting, and get the best feathers from the blackcock's wings. Anne mounted Ben Falloch before she was done ; stood without deadly fatigue on the towering summit, felt the ice-cold wind on her cheek, and looked at the world of the Country crumpled into a corner at her feet, as Finralia and Mary had done, and felt that now the sickness would leave her heart, now all earthly passions would fade and vanish in this wide circle—walking in the fine autumn weather from morning till night, from the hour when the dew was yet resting on the stubble to the moment when the white moonlight again shone on the loch. Another moon, the hunter's for the harvest moon ; oh ! how thankful Anne was that the first was past, the first cycle of a new life ; it had been a bad time, an evil moon to her, a moon of gall and not of honey ; within its little four weeks it had graspingly fulfilled the offices of both the old and the new year—

It brought me a friend and a true, true love,
And the New Year will take 'em away ;

until at night, dead tired, Anne crept to bed and lay in the black and white bedchamber apathetic and insensible to torture ; that was the great good for her, at this moment. There are conditions of the body when total rest is the sole resource, and there are states

of the heart when forgetfulness or inability to think is the only refuge.

There was one advantage of living in this glen out of the world, and having to ride nine or ten miles to communicate with any individual whom they did not consider a member of the family, that the household at Aldour and Anne Macdonald could avoid casual encounters with John Dunglas and the Robertsons of Croclune. Flora did write that particular engagements detained her and Maclean in the Country, and that she would not pay her farewell visits for some time. It mattered little at Aldour now whether the couple departed or tarried, though had they gone two months ago it might have altered the tenor of more than two lives, but now it was too late to produce any greater effect than a momentary additional pang of indignation and hostility.

An uninitiated guest at the House in Aldour, a laird from far up or far down the country, a talkative and consequential, but ignorant factor's wife, would mention John Dunglas; he had been at this or that gathering; it was reported that he was going to ally himself with the Robertsons of Croclune. What a come down! When old Dunglas was hale and hearty, how fiercely he would have opposed the union, and rather disinherited his only son than seen it accomplished. But young men were wilful, and old men grew frail, and so their heirs ate the fruit of their desires, and often found it an indigestible meal. The pride of the chiefs was shorn since the red soldiers

took their vassals' weapons ; the glory of the country was on the wane ; young Dunglas might wed whom he would, did not Aldour think so ?

Not even at the chapel of Choillean did the old friends look at each other from a distance, for although the Robertsons flaunted there in great bravery, John Dunglas absented himself from psalm and prayer. Only once from the Schoolhouse, where they had retreated at the approach of the couple, Mary and Anne caught a glimpse of John Dunglas, beside the laughing gipsy face of Nancy Robertson, as they galloped on their ponies along a cross road to Croclune.

On two successive occasions, indeed, a servant informed Mary Aldour that John Dunglas had ridden slowly through the glen and past the House, and Mary thought he might have kept away a little longer, but in both instances Anne was safe at five or six miles distance.

Mary and Anne were out on the moor. Upon the moor is not the same in associations as being at the loch side, or down the glen, or in the curiously shaped grain fields, or even up some tributary corrie, with its fringe of bushes and its leaping water running into a miniature glen, with some shepherd's hut built of turf or loose stones, its fire in the centre of the room, its chimney a ragged hole in the thatch, its shed for the cow or the goats only divided from the main chamber by a rude partition, and its walls hung round with nets and skins again—‘like the hunter's home in Ithaca,’ and its turf seat before the door—for the great

House of Aldour. The loch side is full of pretty tripping rurality and soft sentimentality, even though it is surrounded by mountains. Down the glen is passing through a peopled strath to the dwellers in Aldour, for pack-horses, foot passengers, carts with wood, or wool, or bark, or a bride's flitting—the rock covered with fine flax, the attendant pipes played proudly, are often appearing or disappearing ; sometimes there is a high as well as a low road winding down the glen, and the effect of the objects in motion, the little groups or solitary figures so many hundred feet above or below the traveller, is Alpine-like in its character. The fields have their workers. The very subordinate glen has its denizen, if not its colony. But even a few yards on the moor is a step into the wilderness ; it is stillness and solitude next to the mountain-tops. They might be but a quarter of a mile from home, but Mary and Anne, on that broken ground, made up of fells, and furrows, and clods innumerable, among those wildest of wild flowers, small, starry, aromatic—the herbs of Corsica, or the prickly vegetation of the desert, listening to that one unchangeable sound of trickling waters, looking up at that sky free there as over the sea—a sky without limits above a brown or purple land without bounds, felt themselves removed from their kind—twin spirits holding communion—‘the world forgetting, by the world forgot.’ In that monotonous landscape, a small variation in the routine is a landmark, and an occasional tree is a

rallying point to which the eye invariably points and the foot turns.

Below an ash-tree on the moor, a quarter of a mile in fact, but very far away in feeling, from the House in Aldour, Mary and Anne sat again where they had often sat before, now expatiating on the concerns of the day, as they could do very tranquilly out here, discussing morals and philosophy rather than fiction, now thinking their own unspeakable thoughts. Although they were so near home, Mary had allowed herself to float so far in fancy, to be so entirely separate with Anne here, that it was a little shock when a curly-headed little runner of her own particular acquaintance burst in upon them with the information that a man wanted to speak with Mary Aldour behind the tomhan, or hillock. Mary had so many men, young and old, who were her fathers, her brothers; nay, her sons, that the message was by no means out of the usual order of her life ; yet with a quick instinct she translated it into English for Anne MacDonald as a person coming on an errand to her with whom she would transact business, presently, without bringing him further. Stately Mary looked and stern as any old maiden or matron of the glen, when passing round the intervening heathery barrier, she stood face to face with John Dunglas. He had not ridden to intercept her this day, he had walked ‘the sax mile and ten,’ through bogs and quagmires, to avoid observation, and to hang unseen within view of the

house where he was once very welcome. He was draggled, pale, exhausted, dejected, yet though Mary did not hold out her hand to him, with the fire of desperation he stretched forth both his hands to take hers. ‘I am come to ask you, Mary Aldour, to let me see Anne.’ Not Miss Macdonald, not Miss Anne Macdonald, as the Country indicated her Lowland foster country, and her need of a poor Lowland title; not Anne Macdonald, as keeping in mind the other Annes—the Anne Lettach, the Anne Corryarrick, even the little Anne Aldour; but plain Anne, the single Anne, who would live in his yearning memory while memory remained to him. ‘Mary Aldour, I want you to let me see Anne.’

‘I will not, John Dunglas,’ Mary answered sharply. ‘I am not going to slur this matter over and pretend not to see it, as is the fashion in polite society. What good can it serve? Do you want to torment where you have forsaken and betrayed? Go to the house if you will; perhaps my father and mother may look over your offence, only don’t try my father too far; but never, never while she honours and blesses us with her presence dare to approach Anne.’

‘But you cannot deny me, Mary; you have no right to intercept me. I must and will speak to Anne again, or I cannot answer for myself,’ he urged, pressing forward.

‘I know I am not able to withstand you, if you have not a shade of manliness left,’ exclaimed Mary, bitterly. ‘It is of a piece with the rest of your be-

haviour ; but if you will consult your own interest, if you will think what Mrs. Maclean and Nancy Robertson will say—'

'Oh ! Mary, have you no mercy upon me ?' asked John Dunglas, turning away. Mary was inclined to answer, 'None ;' but she allowed herself to look on her old playfellow and friend, haggard, distressed, and, above all, abased before her, and she burst into tears and wrung her hands—'Oh ! John Dunglas, how could you disappoint and deceive us ?'

'I did not mean to deceive you ; I swear I would rather have destroyed myself ; but don't go and cry for me, Mary Aldour, I am not worth one of your tears ; I ask only a single word with Anne. Do you think I would hurt her ? Can you believe I would hurt Anne, Mary ?'

'You have hurt Anne already, John Dunglas,' Mary said, mournfully rather than reproachfully ; and John Dunglas groaned—'Oh ! Mary, Mary ! let me see her, let me speak to her once again ; I may never have another opportunity ; she will be going south, and we will perhaps never meet again—better for both our sakes ; but only this once, to beg her pardon, what I would not do to another mortal breathing ; to tell her how miserable I am, to hear her dear voice ; I know she will forgive me—I know she will pity me.'

Mary could not withstand him ; she would not have been able to prevent the interview if she had persevered. John Dunglas pushed past her and went straight to Anne, and Mary stood thinking how

wretched a thing life was, and how the majestic calamities of the maidens with their hair like the storm and their eyes like stars, and the heroes of the buskin'd feet and the arms bearing the bossy shields, sons of the King of Spears, had revolved into the petty weakness, selfishness, and falseness of girls with dressed heads and lads in trews, and Mary was tempted to think the last evils the sorcer to bear.

Mary had no watch, but she stood or strolled in the silent afternoon, till she remarked how much longer the shadow of the ash fell on the heather, and then she could bear it no longer. She did not care how much she intruded on them, she would put an end to these last words, she would rescue Anne from the intolerable suffering. Mary came round the hillock, and found them still beneath the ash-tree, John Dunglas sitting where he had thrown himself when he had surprised Anne, and Anne standing beside him, as she had risen up when she had recognised him. There was a meaning in their relative positions—in John Dunglas covering his face with his hands, and Anne stooping and touching his shoulder. They might hold these places henceforth ; they would never stand side by side as man and wife. Mary understood it when Anne, in place of starting away or remaining unconscious of her presence, called to her eagerly, ‘Come here, Mary, and help to convince him.’ Mary knew in an instant what assurance she was to convey, as well as if she had been told it word for word.

Anne was not overcome or flurried ; she was looking yet purer and sweeter than Mary had ever seen her. Her plaid had fallen from her, and left her in her pretty house-dress—the open skirt, with the body cut square, and the fall of lace on the shoulders where it met the clear, delicate neckerchief crossed upon the bosom ; the black velvet hat, with the heavy round feathers ; her dark brown hair turned up from the brow so modest in its openness. She had lost the worn look which had haunted her for the last few weeks, though he was there almost prostrate before her, she had gone out of herself to raise him. ‘Come here, Mary ; he has told me all, and he has told Nancy Robertson ; he is dealing fairly by himself and by all at last. He has been volatile, rash, and headstrong, but not heartless or wicked, and his peace will come again—tell him so, Mary.’

‘Never, Anne, never,’ exclaimed John Dunglas, vehemently.

‘Oh ! yes, yes. It is not too late to repent ; it can never be too late to repent here below ; and God will bless us, though our lives should be different from what they might have been ; though our fates should be altered. Nancy Robertson——’

‘Don’t speak of her, Anne, I cannot bear it. Shame upon me if I hear any harm of her—but you will not blame her, and yet I cannot listen to you.’

‘Yes, John, dear John Dunglas, you must have patience, you must endure it ; she is very young, and it was all true what she told you, that she had cared for

you before you ever saw my face, and she could not give you up. You owe her a great duty ; perhaps you would never have been happy if you had slighted it even unwittingly, and now you must fulfil it to the best of your ability, like a man, and God will bless your faithfulness. She loves you with all her heart, and she is so young that you will become almost responsible for her growing into your likeness, your fellow and friend ; and I will be very glad to hear of your happiness ; I will rejoice wherever I may be.'

'Oh ! Anne, Anne, for our two whole lives are we sundered by my hands ?—for our two lives ?'

'You have so many blessings—your old father, you must content him, you must never suffer the punishment to fall on him ; your glen and your people, who are so proud of their young Laird and confident of his will to serve them ; your friends, they will all return to you, they will all be won back when they see you resolute to atone for the wrong you have done—when they find you just and true and on every side respected ; see, Mary will be friends with you again, this moment, when I bid her ; Mary will be your supporter.'

'Oh ! Anne, must it be for life ? Is there no remedy—no other work or sacrifice ? Am I called upon to give you up for life as the penalty of a day's—a week's madness ? We are young ; are we to be no more to each other for our long lives ?' That cry rang in Mary's ears for days. 'For life, Anne ? Are we never to come together again in our whole lives ?'

'Life is not long at the best or the worst, John ; we might have been united, and death might have severed us in a few months, or years. Life is short, but it is our school for eternity, which is long—long.'

'Go, John Dunglas,' exclaimed Mary Aldour with a sob, clasping his hand, but Anne bent forward with her arms extended and kissed him for the first and last time.

'They took but ae kiss, and they tore themselves away.'

Mary was thankful when she had Anne within the sanctuary of home, for brave and noble as she had been, she was wan and weak before they crossed the threshold of Aldour.





CHAPTER XII.

ANNE'S LESSON TO MARY.

ANNE was the better for that farewell, sad though it was. Vague mysteries, shifting, uncertain conjectures and suspicions, darkling condemnations, are the worst enemies with which we can contend in this world ; secrecy and silence, anxiety, doubt, and dread, chilling into despair, are the foes that starve out a beleaguered camp ; no attack but may be repelled, no charge but may be withstood, but famine crows the highest spirit, and eats out the firmest resolution. A loss once clearly ascertained, a sorrow fully comprehended, above all, a fault told to a brother, is robbed of half its sting.

Anne had decided that she would not quit Aldour at once ; she would not behave like a love-sick girl who could not control herself ; it was not consistent with the self-respect which was then so impressed upon women—not to bear and forbear. At first the determination was for her own sake, now it was also for his, and even for that of Nancy Robertson, who had robbed her of what was dearer to her than her life-blood.

Anne talked frankly though sparingly in her conversations with Mary upon her views and wishes. 'I will wait till the frost winds are here, Mary; I will see all our favourite spots again in the brilliant colours of the fall of the year, and then I will return "to the braw, braw town" of which we have sung—do you remember, Mary? Ah! "the braw, braw town" has its advantages, I believe that, beforehand. I will attend a singing class and take lessons in lacquer work this year, and then I have my aunts and cousins to think about and go out with. They say John Dunglas and Nancy Robertson will be married before winter; but what of that? I am not standing between them. I would put their hands within each other, if I could. I will wish them joy; I am staying on purpose to wish them joy.'

'But, Anne, is not that indeed heaping coals of fire on their heads?'

'No, Mary, unless it is to melt their hearts. I have questioned myself, and I am sure it is only peace I seek. I have caused contention among you, and now I wish to hush it up and leave you all reconciled.'

'That cannot be, my dear girl; it would be immoral, unprincipled. I will not go to Croclune again, I wish I had never visited it, I am sick of it. John Dunglas will not seek to enter Aldour after Nancy Robertson is his wife.'

'But, Mary, you must think better of it for my sake,' begged Anne. 'He will have a hard struggle,

poor fellow, without the addition of animosity from Aldour. For my honour, that I may have rest in my mind, you must let everything be as it has been. It is not cowardliness, it is not craft, it is charity. You cannot live out of the world, you must encounter such men and women as the Robertsons, and there is no saying how much they've been misled and tempted by a careless, worldly up-bringing. You must go amongst them to improve them. I always thought that you raised the society you were in, Mary Aldour—that you taught Mackie to be upright as well as affable, honest as well as obliging ; and Mr. Cormac Macgregor to be kindly. What is forgiveness worth if it is not forgetfulness ? Oh ! you must help him, Mary ; you must be my representative in his house. I am afraid his wife will be thoughtless and try him. I doubt—I doubt her violent fancy for him will wear off, and then if he has not planted esteem and affection in its stead, if he has not learned to control her by getting her to look up to him, if he cannot guide her by kindness, what is to become of them ? And he is young, and unstable, and violent, I know it, to be forced to exert his authority, and to think and decide for both so soon. Oh ! you must watch over them, Mary, and be their disinterested, generous, magnanimous friend. I know it cannot be my part, but I declare I would give all I have in the world to be at liberty to take it. For myself, I will soon get over this cross ; I will soon be perfectly contented and cheerful ; but I'll tell you what would make me

very miserable—what I believe I could not get over, what would go far to break my poor heart—if John Dunglas, who courted me among the mountains during these long summer days, and whom I loved dearly, were ruined and undone ; if I credited that he was in a fair way to be lost for this world and the next ; if I could not pray and trust that we would meet again, ransomed from selfishness and passion, redeemed from sin and sorrow, Mary, like the angels in heaven.'

'I will do all that I can, my darling ; I will try to perform every request of yours,' promised Mary, quite subdued and awed. 'It is so strange to hear such a petition from you, my dear friend, so strange, but so good both for you and me.'

So Mary managed that there was no great rupture between the contending houses, and not only that Aldour did not call John Dunglas out, but that he saluted him after a surly manner when they met at courts, commissions, and sales. More she could not obtain in the meantime, but Aldour was notoriously placable, and in a due interval the slight and injury would slip out of his mind. Mary herself wrote a decent note of congratulation to Mrs. Maclean ; wonderfully true, as Mary comforted herself ; for the Croclune family might now make the best they could of poor John Dunglas ; and after Anne's example, and from her own generous instincts, Mary would scorn to do them mischief in the Country, or seek anything but the most that could be expected—their tolerable well-

being. Mrs. Maclean replied in her self-satisfied, affected style, but even she had the grace to keep away from Aldour ; and John Dunglas did not come again.

As the Robertsons were not inclined to let the grass grow on the great marriage which they had secured for Nancy, the wedding did take place before Croclune was robbed of all its enchanting summer beauty, and with such an array of pipers and followers, and feasting and fiddling, on John Dunglas's part, as might veil the inferior position of the bride ; and Nancy was carried to Dunglas, to solace the old Laird, to charm the young, to be the house mistress of the family, and the Lady of the glen. If John Dunglas swore his vows with a heavy and a humbled heart, he swore them with the purpose of keeping them ; and Nancy cared little for what had gone before ; little for the violence and the guile—Nancy believed thoroughly that stratagems are allowable in love and war—little for the other love ; not even much for the dull bridegroom ; she knew one thing, she had won John Dunglas, the greatest match and the prettiest young man in the Country. She wore a brocade richer far than Flory's, for she was a grander lady now, and John Dunglas's grandmother's point-lace apron, fastened in front with a diamond buckle, though she refused to cover ever so small a portion of her profuse dark hair, gathered into a lavish mass of curls, with the tiny point-lace cap of the same potent dame, who would have annihilated her could she have

foreseen the destination of her treasures. She was going, she, the gipsy of Crochune, to rule and reign in Dunglas ; to take precedence of Mary Aldour ; to overtop and overcrow every matron in the Country, except Pitfadden's wife, who had been always finding fault with her and setting her right, and with whom she was now prepared to open a furious rivalry.

And how did the autumn days wane at Aldour when the leaves were falling and the coral of the rowan beginning to show on bare branches ? The wedding-day was not the worst day at Aldour. Who does not know that the funeral day of our love and hope is not the day of our greatest mourning ? Who has not felt marvellously sustained for that period, and looked back upon it with wonder ?

'Dear Anne,' whispered Mary, anxiously, as the twilight set in, and Anne would play reels and strathspeys on the spinnet, 'are you not overtasking yourself ? This is not natural. Be silent, come to our room, do what you will, but do not thrum over those merry, foolish dances.'

'Not at all, my dear,' whispered Anne, in return, looking round and allowing the flickering light from the crackling billet of wood to light up her small pale face, with the dimples, and the 'lovely eyes.' 'And I am not so light-headed as you think. I have repeated a text of Scripture a hundred times to-day. I once knew a person who enabled herself to sustain a great blow to her worldly expectations by constantly citing, when her mind would dwell upon

her loss, the counter charge, “Let your treasure be in heaven, and your heart there also.” Now, I have been telling myself over and over again, “Love thy neighbour as thyself,” Anne Macdonald—here is a fine call to practise your profession—and you see it has quieted my regrets—it has conquered. I have sung my psalm, now let me play my gay tune.’

Oh ! wise old Grizel Baillie—wise and tender ; how you shook your head and sang with that indefinable blending of pathos and humour which meets us at every step of our true lives—

If I had not a licht heart
I would dee.

And poor Parson Evans sang also, ‘because he was full of melancholy.’

The new establishment at Dunglas and the old one at Aldour did not come into speedy contact. The Aldour family were not ostentatious in paying their compliments, and John Dunglas could not resist shunning them for a while, but at last not only Aldour and Mary rode to Dunglas and dined as the hearty custom was with their neighbours, but Nancy and Anne met in some of the usual galas given in the Country. How Nancy did bear herself ; how consequential and flighty she was by turns ; how she either oppressed John Dunglas with attention or neglected his wishes and intentions entirely ; how diverted she was when he held back from Anne, and how she pouted openly when he came forward at last and talked with her gravely and deferentially.

Mary did not know whether to laugh or to cry, but the bride of Dunglas was far too great a child, and a foolish child, to be angry with for long ; she would have her own troubles to bear—her own battles to fight. ‘Wow !’ as innocent old Mrs. Maclauchlan (Robbie’s mother) exclaimed, ‘it makes me eerie to see a wife who has a house to manage, and folk to maintain in order, so glaikit still.’

There were two good things to be thankful for—Mrs. Maclean was no longer present to introduce fatal discord among the simple, strutting, inflammable bodies, and Anne was going within a week. Mary saw it written in giant letters that it would never do for Anne to linger longer at Aldour ; she had remained long enough to crown herself with a true martyr’s crown ; to answer every thoughtful, generous purpose. For John Dunglas’s and for Nancy’s good, if not for her own peace, she must depart now, and return not for years to come. To avoid subjecting John Dunglas to a continued comparison between the two, and tempting Nancy to the degradation and frenzy of jealousy, should be quite enough to ensure her absence, without the improbability of her friends consenting to her farther so-called humiliation.

But Anne visited duly every place to which she had first attached herself at Aldour—every walk and seat which she had haunted with John Dunglas. Much as Anne had risen in Mary’s opinion, great as was the influence which had reversed their positions, and rendered Mary, who had at first dic-

tated to her friend and patronized her, the most devoted of her admirers, and the most obedient of her servants, Mary could not at first understand and was rather inclined to resist this, to her, harrowing measure, protracted over many days. But, 'Ah ! let-a-be, Mary dear,' Anne cried, 'it will be for the last time ; it is my farewell. Don't look alarmed, my dear friend, I will come back after a while to Aldour for many a season, and we will have our walks, and rides, and works, and visits, and carpet dances very comfortably, but I will never more go near in the old spirit the clematis bower by the loch, or Spout Bahn, or the ash on the moor, or even the turf seat before old Ailie Kittoch's door.'

And strong, slow Mary comprehended that Anne went like Jephthah's daughter to mourn on the mountains before she died to the past and lived a new woman to the future. It was a final indulgence, not weak, though it was fond, and Mary saw that she had it to the full, and attended her loyally during its fulfilment.

The glen was in its glory ; the sereness of the bracken was lending a world of rich straw colour, ruddy gold, and umber-brown tints, which made up for the paling purple flush of the heather ; the nuts were dropping from their husks ; the black brambles were still to be found in remote corners. Ash, oak, and wild cherry, the limes, plums, beeches, and chestnuts which the old lairds had planted here and there in their breaks of woodland, were brushed with russet,

and crimson, and copper, with orange and with scarlet, all turning up the dark green liveries of the sombre firs, and the crumbling earthiness and ashiness of the hawthorns and the birks, and when the sharp, clear air told on everything, brought the far frowning mountains near, and set in bold relief every bush and tree, when the robin redbreast trilled his late song, and the labourers brought into the barns their most forlorn sheaves of oats and rye, then few would have ventured to dispute that Aldour was fairer in its ripe maturity than in its spring ; that as the sunset has a calm, majestic glory, which the glad dawn wants, so there is a spell in declining, dying nature, an ineffable, tranquil charm which we would do well to fathom.

Anne had trodden every locality sacred to her for ever—had not feared to face them steadily, and now she shut all their doors softly, and took leave of her kindred and went away, quite prosaically, mind, as to facts, in a post-chaise, favoured by the company of a respectable old Highlander bound for Hallowmass Fair. All travellers are not so fortunate in their adjuncts as Malcolm Macdonald, who ‘went to London to be hanged, and returned in a post-chaise with Miss Flora Macdonald.’ And Anne kept looking back and nodding over and over again her cheerful good-byes, and calling, ‘ You will soon take a jaunt to see me, all of you ; you will send my aunt the venison, Aldour, and I will remember all the patterns, dearest Mary.’

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Mary wiped her eyes. ‘She is an angel ; we have entertained an angel unawares. How could I ever be so gross and dull to fancy that poor fellow John Dunglas too good a match for my dear cousin Anne Macdonald ?’





CHAPTER XIII.

MARY'S PERPLEXITY.

DHE glens were white with winter.' Aldour was now a magnificent piece of goldsmith's work of frosted silver, now swept bleak and bare—a model of clay, but still the simple cast of a grand design. The road to the Spout Bahn was well-nigh impassable to the hardiest foot, though it was sufficiently tempting with its glittering 'dead men's fingers' or pendants of icicles by way of girandoles, and its steaming breath feathering with fairy touches rock and tree. Dreary though it was, there was something very charming in Aldour under its still white mantle—a sleeping beauty while the snow lasted, and it lay long in those localities. The lochan was never solitary or sad ; even when it was a thaw it was all a flutter with Northern water-birds of curious varieties that might have sailed round the masts of ancient mariners ; you almost imagined that you would detect not only a snowy albatross, but a queer grotesque penguin in the number. Aldour had always plenty of work shooting these strangers, and even in that comparatively un

zoological age, sending them off to be stuffed, in order to be farther distributed among ornithological friends. When the weather was severe the greater part of the loch was so surely converted into muddled or transparent black or green ice, that it became a thoroughfare in whose favour the high road was deserted. No use for Aldour to talk himself hoarse about the springs; gentle and simple, young and old, neighbouring lairds and ladies, farm-servants and carriers, insisted on travelling by Loch Aldour; the very old wives seemed to come down from the hills for the express purpose of carrying some part of their kain, their flax, eggs, and nuts across the crystal pathway. A very picturesque thing it was to see some of these fine old women, ('stately, erect, and self-satisfied, without a trace of the languor or coldness of age; they march . . . with gaudy-coloured plaids fastened about their breasts with a silver brooch, like the full moon in size and shape. They have a peculiarly lively blue eye and a fair, fresh complexion. Round their heads is tied the very plain kerchief Mrs. Page alludes to when Falstaff tells her how well she would become a "Venetian tire," and on each cheek depends a silver lock, which is always cherished, and considered, not improperly, as a kind of decoration.') They steered mostly with great dignity and decision, but now and then they would grow bewildered, and, standing still in the middle, wave their sticks wildly and call shrilly for succour. Many a wilful cailliach Mary Aldour had hurried out to pioneer—once she had brought one to land with the

two withered hands supported on her young, slim shoulders. Aldour loch dull in winter? Why, to the natives it was more like the Danube at Vienna, or the Thames in the days of Hans Keeldar.

Then the Christmas festivities and the Christmas doles were drawing near. At Aldour, as at many places in the Highlands where the Church was Episcopalian and the residents Irish, British, Danish—anything but Saxon of the Lowland Scotch type in descent, the Christmas was more an English Christmas, half-solemn, half-bright with the lavish hospitality of the Highland fashion, than the broad Dutch jollity and rest of ‘the daft days’ of the Scotch New Year, which the sober and serious in the South were for ever forced to impugn and hold in check.

Mary had at last ceased to miss Anne's sense and sweetness with a perpetual consciousness of want, though she might have written for a time, ‘The house seems so strange without you, my room so unoccupied, my affairs, and interests, and thoughts so uncomfortable in wanting your participation;’ adding plaintively, in those days when even merry folk thought no shame to be plaintive, ‘write to me kindly, think of me partially, come to me willingly, and dream of me if you will.’ Mary was soon used to the deprivation in her active, sympathetic life, though she always wrote herself into fits of pensiveness, and generally considered herself inconsolable for the loss of this life-friend, as for the earlier but as tenaciously remembered school companions of Inverluig, and thirsting for an interchange

closer than by letter of thought and sentiment, pining for a renewed experience of their high principles, their correct judgments, their tender feelings, their ‘sleepless discretion,’ their ‘politeness, which followed them into the homeliest scenes of domestic privacy’—such were the terms, yet Mary commonly got on very well with her reserved, engaged mother, her frank, free father, her commonplace, sometimes contentious neighbours, her old familiar, obstinate, unruly servants, her boy brother, and the sickly little ones.

Mary had begun to give up reminding herself that she was bound to bear no grudge against Croclune and Dunglas. Indeed, Mary found herself engrossed with her own concerns, and that though these were not always of the most agreeable description, for somehow this Christmas did not seem the same as other Christmases. Mary could not exactly tell why, but the idea weighed upon her like the burden of sultriness in the air. Perhaps the continued absence of Charlie, the young Laird, and her sisters, at college and school, had a little concern with the unacknowledged depression which to Mary's mind hung over their gaieties. In anticipation of their return home in the summer they were spending their Christmases with friends near at hand. Old Scotch families were very fond of great family gatherings, but they had also a most wholesome respect to the expense and the difficulty of travelling, when Aldour must have gone himself to fetch the girls, who could not ride for a whole day like Mary at this season, and the young Laird must have posted express or

ventured on his feet home amidst much hardship and a little danger.

But they had plenty of other friends, high and low, at Aldour. As many of the clans as liked to play at games, to run, and leap, and put the stone, and dance on a board Ghyllie Callum, and the reel of Hullachan on the green, and be refreshed with fat brose, and cakes and ale, and usquebagh. As many of the wives and children to be treated with white bread and basins of tea and warm milk, and raisins and sugar-balls. As many guests upstairs as the rooms could hold, or could not hold. How did they get accommodation for the night? Dr. Johnson tells us, ‘eight rooms for seven-and-thirty lodgers; temporary beds in the dining-room, where they stowed all the young ladies, a room above stairs with six beds, in which they put ten men.’ Mr. Cormac Macgregor was something of a misanthropist and shunned company, but Mackie and Mr. Macdonnel of the School-house, and their whole progeny, feasted for a week on roast goose, roast turkey, the inevitable mutton, eel-pies, tea-cakes and biscuits, claret and strong tea. There were cousins, subordinate like Mackie or overbearing like Macdonnel of Corryarrick, who was going into perpetual huffs at Aldour’s carelessness and negligence, though he did not hesitate to hold his Christmas at his free kinsman’s expense. There were kinswomen setting the fashion or getting the fashion from Mary Aldour. There were eating and drinking, card-playing and dancing, story-telling and song-singing over the

whole house. Mary exerted herself to do her duty and entertain everybody, from the loftiest Mrs. Macdonnel to the lowliest little Cathleen, but she could never get rid of the idea that there was a cloud upon them, a distraction at the point of the ghostliest legend, a weight on the liveliest lilt.

Mary was in demand, here and there and everywhere, settling the pools, arranging the sets, and maralling the courses, with nobody but Mackie to depend upon, and Mackie as often blundered as not from sheer willingness. This was the sort of delegation which her mother committed to Mary, while she herself sat or walked from room to room with the stiffest old ladies, or listened to the most veteran lairds, or stole out of the party every now and then to visit Annie in her nursery, or to counsel Niel to leave the hall with the guisards, and the old-world freats and rites observed most strictly there, before his holiday strength was altogether exhausted.

Yet Mary could find leisure to reflect on the singular, intangible something which had spoilt this Christmas, and which she had fought against helplessly and hopelessly, as one struggles with the obstacles in a dream. Mary could only alight upon two indirect causes for the indirect dissatisfaction and apprehension. Aldour was not himself—he did not forget his anxieties and vexations as he had been wont to do. Several of his guests and friends remarked that something ailed him, though he disclaimed the observation loudly and almost angrily; and this gathering gloom

in her kind, hearty father, which could beset him so, that Mary discovered him more than once looking vaguely into the fire, or wistfully out of the windows, or even sitting with his head on his hand in the dark corner behind the piper, when he ought to have been filling the arduous post of an equally attentive and hilarious host which he had formerly vindicated to perfection, brewing one dare not say how many punch bowls innocuously—(ah, me ! it was a sadder, sorer test to a man's manhood to empty Rory More's horn than to draw Rory More's sword)—or dancing the Highland Fling to perfection opposite Mackie in the unintermitting reel. But this year—run over, as the House did, with the usual extravagant merriment—it was not Aldour who struck the highest keynote, and this deficiency was the more felt that Mrs. Macdonnel was a staid, stately woman, who wished all her guests well, but who was never expected to contribute to their amusement ; and though Mary Aldour did wonders, she was but a girl, after all.

The next straw in the amber was that Finralia was an invited guest in the Christmas week at Aldour. Aldour apologized for the circumstance because he was so near a neighbour, and had been lately much connected with him in sport and business—really it was time those old feuds and antipathies came to an end ; and Mrs. Macdonnel and Mary, with their high loyalty to heavy, but hasty Aldour, permitted the amendment and the advances to acquaint-

ance and friendship. But the argument had certainly possessed no force before, and however plausible it sounded, it was unnatural from Aldour's lips; and Mary, though no longer either stunned or electrified by the enemy's presence, in place of regarding Finralia as a substitute for John Dunglas, was greatly put about by his company, and disturbed to account for it to her old circle. Their exclamations, comments, and conjectures were the worst of the intrusion, for Mary and Finralia were as strictly cold and polished to each other as a couple of swords or dirks; only it plagued Mary to know that the black sheep was there, it was against her tastes and principles; his short, caustic speeches, when she overheard them, made her burn to retort; his eye upon her troubled her, and it was a basilisk eye, found in every corner. Then the tabooed position which Finralia still held in the Country, in spite of Aldour's extending the white flag to him—the rest of the Macdonnels, and Macgregors, and Maclaunchlans being rather shy to follow the example—compelled Mary, in the light of his host's daughter, to notice him. She wondered how a proud man like Finralia brooked these slights and extorted concessions; but from what dropped from him Mary understood that he lived in the world, and moved in society, as Harry Smith fought 'for his own hand,' not to plunder, as once on a time, but to pluck when he could what pleasure he chose, without regard to the opinions of others. He certainly held, whether he sported it or not, the old Free Lance's defiance—

I care for nobody—no, not I!
And nobody cares for me.

Really Finralia was not the only man who then practised and did not care to conceal ‘a general contempt for everybody and everything, a disdain alike of every happiness and every misery’ ; but maintaining such a hateful indifference and independence, Mary marvelled that he performed so many duties and charities as were imputed to him—attended to the business which had descended upon him as successor to his father in the monopoly of the legal offices of Inverluig—protected his deformed sister, Miss Ussie—did not abuse his tenants—had not been guilty of any recent outbreak against the public standard of decorum.

And Finralia was feared in the country, whether because the gentlemen paid through him and his clerks their taxes and assessments, and had to account to him for any irregularity in their accounts or failure in their moneys, whether as Pitfadden’s agent—and under that name he was an enterprising, energetic man, though singularly passive about his own property of Finralia. People shrugged their shoulders at Finralia, and left him a good deal to himself in the silence and solitude which the man affected, but they never thought of deriding him, they would have been very cautious of openly insulting him.

Still to see such a figure stalking about among kinsmen and old friends at the celebration of Christmas, was like having a skeleton at one’s feast, if not the

sword of Damocles over one's head, and was quite sufficient to render a person of an ardent temperament uncomfortable, and to worry such a one with an obligation which could never be settled by paying a debt which should never have been due. Never a morning or evening but Mary Aldour was bound to provide some change or choice to Finralia, averse to his individuality as she was. It was constantly, 'Finralia, will you join the game of ball on the green?' 'Finralia, will you sit beside my father at table?' 'Finralia, will you name one of your tunes to the piper?' 'Finralia, it is your turn at "questions and commands," or "to love your love with an A." Night after night, came it early or came it late, Mary had to dance a minuet or a reel with Finralia, lest he should have it to say that he had gone without a partner. She had reason to recal her avoidance of him that evening at Croclune with keen self-mockery; she did not indeed ask him to dance, but she kept her hand disengaged, and went to his quarter of the hall or the dining-room, and Finralia never failed to take the hint and come and claim her hand and lead her out; and they performed their evolutions with the gravity of two judges, or rather two old foes who could not quench their deadly feud. Their conversation was always short and distasteful, particularly when Finralia spoke of young Dunglas, asked after his engagements, believed he was a famous dancer, 'the lightest pair of heels in the country.' He might not have meant anything, but if he had added, as it had

seemed on the tip of his tongue to do, that 'Dunglas was also adroit in changing partners,' Mary would undoubtedly have stared him full in the face and sat down the very next round. Come what might, once and again they differed in general remarks. Mary was always candid and earnest, even about the candles in the sconces, or the measure of the melody, and Finralia ambiguous, and careless, and cold. Once Mary forgot their distance and accused him of laziness and pride, and he asked what there was to labour for unless a man held a commission in life? but he roused himself while he spoke, and seemed so to relish the accusation that Mary never repeated the indiscretion.

Mary could not have guessed that he complied with her courtesy in another spirit than her own or except as a form. Oh! silly Mary, with all her quickness—for neither friend nor foe of Finralia's had ever discovered him heedful of forms; indeed, did it not belong to his exiled state in the Country that he and his had despised and set at nought the very good old husks of respectability, truth, purity, and mercy, which people are fond of preserving when they have not penetrated to the kernels, or having reached them, have been fain to reject them as mawkish and insipid, or overhard and indigestible—that high, deep tale of the Apostle's, as to whatsoever is pure, honest, lovely, of good report, think of these things?

Very fortunately for the peace of the community, Mary never dreamt that Finralia waited and watched

for, that he snatched at—raging at himself the while—her simple condescension. But she did see that her father was relieved, that he was pleased by her overtures. Having brought Finralia to Aldour again, he was as desirous that his friend should receive attention as on the first occasion of his crossing the threshold, on the day when Mary and he ascended Ben Falloch. Standing behind the rows of the dancers in his dress coat, with the broad gold lace, and the big gold buttons, and tapping his silver-mounted snuff mull, Aldour would receive them as they prepared to return to their seats; he would hail them with zealous approval and welcome: ‘Well danced, Finralia; you and Mary make a strapping couple, my lad, though I should not say so. What! Mally, you won’t have compliments? She has given you her last set, Finralia. I don’t mean that she would not have danced with you sooner if you had been more forward. No, no, man; but she has given you her last set, the very last dance she can have to-night, lay that to your credit, Roderick Finralia. Now take a pinch, sir,’ just as he had applauded them standing together on the crest of the mountain.





CHAPTER XIV.

MARY'S SHAME.

HE spring was budding green in Aldour; showers of the most delicate brown and crimson-tinged verdure had fallen on the stripped and naked landscape; the blackbird and thrush were pruning their feathers and pouring forth their first notes. Aldour was sheltered and early in all vegetation; the primroses were blossoming in fair, pale tufts; the blue periwinkle was nodding in the recesses; the hyacinth, the orchis, the delicate china-like wood-sorrel carpeted the dells, while snow still rested in great patches in Finralia, and nothing but withered leaves was borne by the wind rustling among its scattered pine-trees. But such a southern lying glen as Aldour, protected on the north by its beetling crags, was a perfect Arcadia in the months of April and May. A person only acquainted with the slow springs and the biting east winds of the Lowlands of Scotland, can scarcely imagine what balm-breathing oases and flowery hollows exist among its savage Grampians. There was not a spot in the United Kingdom richer

in wild flowers and singing birds—those singing birds, of which Dr. Johnson did not hear one—than Glen Aldour. The cuckoo sang there before he had reached the midland English counties.

The very rural, pastoral life of the people; the flocks of goats and sheep, and herds of black cattle—the Highland kyloes with their tremendous horns, shaggy heads, and queer, sagacious faces, which make all other cows look tame, dull, and silly in comparison; the details of the ford and the pen, were all dependent upon, and enlivened by this early gowany character of the glen. After the ice and snow-drifts, the exposure and risks to their property, the smothered sheep, the sickly lambs, the precarious sustenance for themselves, the whole glen rose up to greet the spring sunshine, and soft showers, and fragrant birk woods. A new animation and buoyancy diffused themselves; men, women, and children, as well as dumb animals and mute nature, ‘broke forth into singing;’ then commenced that chorus, passed from rower to reaper, which the Doctor appreciated, though he found no other music. Without any set gala, it was like the spirit of the old May-day to listen to the herdsman as he turned out his flock, the fisherman as he launched his boat on the loch, the cooper as he constructed new cogs and pails, and the women with their peculiar, rude, but sweet impromptu verses, as they began to clean out their houses, and seek out and mend their stock of clothes, and get in their stores of provisions for the first removal to the mountains. Great gossip-

ing, much love-making prevailed, after the interrupted and impeded intercourse of the winter months; you were constantly stumbling on pairs standing ‘wae to part,’ on the hill-side or by the loch’s brims. All hearts were softened and gladdened; long summer days, fresh-budding hawthorn, and blooming heather, existence as a wild, hardy people loved it in the open air among the hill breezes and the glen’s beauty, and in all the bustle of sheep-shearing, hay-making, the shielings, with corn-cuttings to close the stirring succession, after the stagnation of winter, was before them. So antagonistic to them still is a quiet existence within doors, that on dark and dreary days they will retire to their box beds at noon, and turn sulkily to the wall, in an endeavour to sleep away the sombre, depressing interval. At least something of their lethargic sloth is a consequence of this infirmity of the impressionable Celtic constitution.

Mary Aldour almost lived among the hills and the woods at this season; loved to hear the first cuckoo, to pluck the first wild anemone, to visit all her old human friends, and all her old local friends, to a great extent shut up from her during the drifts and the dripping landslips and flooded waters—more formidable than the iron-bound earth—extending from November to February.

Yet over the barrier of one ridge of the hills John Dunglas and his young wife were packing up bag and baggage, to remove to England for the summer, to visit Flora with her husband’s regiment in Yorkshire,

and then to sojourn at one of those intoxicating, gad-about watering-places, whose fame had reached even the Scotch Highlands. Nancy was tired of presiding as a house-dame at Dunglas, and competing for supremacy with Pitfadden's lady. It was not so merry a thing as she had supposed, to' be a wedded wife and mistress of a family. Often, in the depth of winter, she had sighed for the numerous faces, the freedom, and the recklessness, and the rollicking shifts of Croclune. John Dunglas was not so nice as he used to be ; he was often cross ; and if he was kind, he was trying to be staid and to lecture her ; she did not care now to row with him, or go a shooting with him all alone in the mornings, or sing for his sole delectation in the evenings. It was not the elysium it had been—it made her yawn, and feel stupid, and grow mischievous. It is to be feared Nancy could have written what Mary Aldour need never have subscribed—‘ I was happy when tea came ; such, I take it, is the state of those who live in the country—meals are wished for from the cravings of vacuity of mind as well as from the desire for eating.’ For old Dunglas, he was a snuffy, sottish carle—he a Highland chief ! He ought to be left to himself and brought to better behaviour—he was so dowff and selfish, not canty and obliging like her father, the Captain ; and the big old man cried like a great baby whenever he was contradicted. She wanted a new field for her bridal finery, and to see Flory and find how she got on ; to show her how much more money she had to spend, and perhaps lend

her a little—poor old Flory! if she would perceive her promotion, and defer a little to her as John Dunglas's lady—far before Christie, the old Commandant's wife—in place of attempting to bridle and saddle her, and striving hard at her with bit and spur to no avail, as her young sister Nancy. Above all, she wanted to go to those delightful Bath or Bristol wells, where people had no end of friends and followers, and shopping, and promenading and dancing every night in the pump-rooms; she would promise John Dunglas not to play if he would only find her partners and not be jealous of them. Oh! ho! he was offended at the very name of jealousy; said it was not a pretty or prudent word on a young wife's lips. What! did he expect her to prove a doll, or a drum-major, or a dowdy? An't he sorry to fancy it? He had better not excite the feeling if he did not wish to hear of it.

Mary kept a clear conscience, and remembered Anne faithfully, by going over to Dunglas before the young couple left. And here virtue had its own reward. Nancy was in high spirits at the prospect before her, and in a state of reaction, after two days' sleet, in which she had only rattled at John Dunglas, old Jenny Mackinnon—who had become broken-down and sour, or dumbfounded and dozened, as she would have styled it, and as the most of the old people had done under the high, hard, heedless hand of the young mistress—or at the younger, more sympathetic maid-servants. She was glad to have Mary to listen to her,

prattled quite freely ; even consented to suffer a few good-natured, womanly cautions as to her luggage and lodgings, hired servants and friends ; and she was neither offended nor scornful when Mary conversed a little with John Dunglas—offered to undertake some commissions for him.

John Dunglas was looking restless and unsettled. Mary was sorry to see him ; she trusted she was of some comfort to him, now that the decisive step of leaving for long was all but taken, and it was too late to retract. She spoke very hopefully of his finding all right at home on his return, and greatly eased his mind by promising to look in upon his old father as often as she could—he was only another added to her many charges ; and, above all, engaging solemnly to let John Dunglas know the moment anything went wrong with the head of the family.

Poor old Dunglas, he was sadly spent now, and it was a pitiable thing to see and hear him, propped up in his great chair and wrapped in plaids, and fretting over a half comprehension of the matter. ‘ Why need you go to the South, John Dunglas ? Did not I let you take the lass you wanted ? A chield with a wife has no cause to roam—he should bide at home and rule his own fireside. What would Nancy Robertson have ? I’ll not plague her long. Och-an-och ! you’ll send Dunglas to the dogs; you’ll waste it upon fiddlers, and horses, and cards, and I’ll live to have you wandering back beggars, and I’ll be a beggar myself before all is done.’ Mary could not say whether it was

weak in John Dunglas to comply with his wife's whims and his own impulses at such a sacrifice, or wise to humour both while they were still manageable and possible, and might be satiated with a little indulgence.

To forsake Dunglas and their natural obligations in the sweet spring ! Yet Mary almost wished she were accompanying them, uncongenial company as they were, at least so far as to enable her to make out that jaunt to see Anne, to form the acquaintance of Anne's often-cited Low Country connexions, and under their countenance to inspect the great cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, and move in their polite and accomplished circles, to her great intellectual edification and satisfaction—an act of which Mary Macdonnel talked and wrote for one half her life.

O tempora ! O mores !—and young ladies now-a-days think nothing of whisking from the lone shadow of Ben Nevis or Ben Macdhui to the world's metropolis on the low banks of the Thames, for a few weeks' jolly sight-seeing and dissipation, before they are out of their teens.

Mary's heart 'grew grit' when she said good-bye to John Dunglas, and he thanked her and attended upon her as he had last done upon Anne Macdonald. John Dunglas had lost his rank with them—he had become a kind of trust to these two girls. Mary must have been provoked to look down upon him as she was disposed to do, but still her heart refused to acknowledge his defalcation and infirmity of purpose, and clung to

him at parting as to a friend ; and Mary's mind misgave her that they might need friends at Aldour ; and Mr. Cormac Macgregor, and Mr. Macdonnel of the Schoolhouse, and Corryarrick, and the rest would only grimace and growl, and hum and take pinches of snuff, and make speeches—they would never listen to her or be swayed by her, far less mount and ride at her bidding ; yet it was all dark ; Mary could not comprehend who or what was in fault, could not account for anything being far amiss. Her father might be behind with his accounts, but retrenching was not so uncommon an experience as to appal Aldour—he might proceed to it with reluctance, but it need not be with dismay.

Mary lived in a region where it was written—‘ Do you know, the Highlanders resemble the French, in being poor with a better grace than other people ? If they want certain luxuries or conveniences, they do not look embarrassed or disconcerted, nor make you feel awkward by paltry apologies which you do not know how to answer ; they rather dismiss any sentiment of that kind by a sort of playful railly, for which they seem to have a talent. . . . People hereabouts, when they have good ancestry, education, and manners, are so supported by the consciousness of those advantages, and the credit allowed for them, that they seem not the least disconcerted at the deficiency of the goods of fortune ; and I give them great credit for their spirit and contentment, though it should provoke the appellation of poor and proud,

which vulgar minds are so ready to apply to them. Is it not a blessed thing that there yet exists a place where poverty is respectable and deprived of its sting ?

Mary was proud to think that not a man in the Country had more sterling credit, was more respected and relied upon, than Aldour. He was reckoned so responsible a person, that he was called upon to take a lead and assume a control which he owed solely to his honourable name and his personal popularity. Mary was not concerned to think that it belonged neither to imposing abilities, nor to extent of territory and fulness of coffers—the advantages of Finralia and Pitfadden ; she triumphed in the contrary conviction.

' My father, the Laird, is not altogether a Solomon ; I believe that man Finralia has more wit and promptitude at his command, when he likes to exert them—he is a sluggard in Finralia. But then, Aldour is a Nathaniel. Oh ! the inhabitants of the Country are right to mark their appreciation of moral over mental worth, of goodness over greatness, a Vicar of Wakefield, or even a Farmer Flamborough, before a Dean Swift.' (Mary was not finical in her analogies.) ' None would have discharged so well the trust for poor Balinacluan's children, who have only, of late, turned up to avail themselves of his integrity. My father never fails in that sagacity which is the dictate of the heart. How well he looks yet when he rides into Inverluig to sit at the head of a board, in his gold-laced coat

and the fine cambric ruffles which my mother span the year they were married, and how pleased I used to be to point him out. May we be delivered from another rebellion ! but were we in danger again, the Laird of Aldour would be a gallant old Captain, (I fear he is looking old, my dear father,) and how I would envy Charlie the post of his lieutenant.'

But now Aldour was behaving more like a desperate man, hunted by evil within, than an honest man frankly contending with difficulties without. There was no word of retrenchment, there was even a wild excess of company and cost ; old pensioners loaded with unnecessary gifts, new servants hired at high wages, old claret, fine seed corn, prime lambs and calves, superior wool, pressed as a mere neighbourly exchange of goods on Pittadden and Corryarrick, who were by no means so lavish in returning the compliment. Was Aldour cheating himself as to the real state of his affairs ? Was he insanely launching out afresh into the very habits which had wasted his patrimony, as if perseverance in them alone could restore it ? Was he bent on clutching at the people's regard, come what would ? And through it all, was the Laird sinking into a captious, excited, unhappy old man ?

Mrs. Macdonnel was the reverse of a family meddler and gossip, yet she remarked the gradual but great change, and interposed with question and remonstrance. Aldour had always looked up to his lady, and he minded her still so far as to call a slight halt to

his profusion, but he would not confess that anything ailed him—was sapping the spring of his joys, and poisoning his whole existence. ‘It is not like you to plague yourself with fool’s fancies,’ he said, discontentedly. ‘What should vex me if you and the bairns are right and I’m in health? It’s a haver that I’ve fallen off, it’s not only a silly haver but an impertinent liberty, which I’ll resent if it is repeated, I warn even you, my lady,’ and Mrs. Macdonnel withdrew from the encounter. Aldour should know his own state, should own a weight upon his heart if weight there was. She was not an irritable woman, but she was not accustomed to be repulsed; she could not urge her rights, and she belonged so largely to those weakly children; if she failed as a wife it was because she was so great in a mother’s powers of protection and devotion, and her case is not an uncommon one.

But Mary thought her mother strangely blind and cold, and was ignorantly and unreasonably vexed, as the good, anxious, energetic eldest daughter feels, by the mother’s absorption in the small fry while the father is drooping or disturbed. ‘How can my mother continue so occupied with Annie’s draughts and drops, and Niel’s steel boot, when Aldour is no more like what he was last year than the lilac which was flourishing in the green court till the blast of wind seized it, twirled it round and round, and tugged at its roots? My father is worth us all. What will Charlie think when he finds him so indifferent about the stag-hounds, and the pike in the loch? How will Cath-

rine and Flora notice the change, poor girls, just when they will expect him to be so blithe over their return? If, indeed, he does not keep his chair soon like old Dunglas, or take to his bed itself.'

Mary bethought her of a prophecy over which she had frequently jested, that the tree of Dunglas would witness the top branch of Aldour split in two, and that Eachan, the seer, could not see another stalwart Laird of Aldour after a certain point, only a lady, 'jimp and sma,' who seemed called up expressly to carry on the honours of the clan. Mary swallowed something in her throat, and meditated an enterprise on her own account to rally and recover the Laird.

But much esteemed, and petted, and perhaps spoiled as Mary was by her father, he did not stand on the same ceremony with her as with her mother. It is a curious fact, that men's natural indulgence or indifference to wife and children is generally in an inverse ratio. Suppose the man pays to his wife the reverence which is her due, he may caressingly or indolently suffer all manner of innocent freedom and loving boldness from his children, but he remains their master, he is a just, generous, slumbering or wide-awake giant to them all their lives. But degrade the marriage bond, falsify or stultify the wife's claims, hold her as a mere plaything and ornament, or as a necessary or compulsory nuisance, and ten to one the lord of the household, if he retains any good instincts, yields to the sceptre of a child, is in terror of his own offspring, and even when by fits asserting his 'right

rule and fair supremacy,' is habitually their abject servant and slave.

'Can I not cast up some of your sums for you, father, and save you a little trouble?' proposed Mary, watching her opportunity, and entering her father's little closet in one of the turrets which bore a bad odour as being the Brownie's Hole, the select residence where the special brownie of the Macdonnels of Aldour was last spied after some of its unaccountable tricks, but which also served for the Laird's cabinet, and contained his guns and his rods, and his bureau, with his powder and flies, and all the papers which were not stowed away in the chest in the garret. In that receptacle Mary could rummage at will, turning over the Latin diary of the confessor, the French memoranda of the soldier of fortune, the marriage contracts and wills, and the ill-spelled, eccentrically-worded items of accounts, and packages of yellow letters of Macdonnels of Aldour, sons of Coll, long dust in their privileged corner of the parish churchyard. The Laird's private papers were rather more sacred, and the Laird was veritably standing before his bureau, crumpling up written documents and snuffing viciously from his mull, when Mary entered with a well-mended pen in her hand, rustling in her ancient lutestring and ruffles, a picturesque and fair scribe, and presented her petition.

'Nonsense, Mally, mind the feeding and the cleeding of the house with your mother, run up and down the glen like another Charlie, but don't puzzle your

brains and dim your bright een with figures. You are not up to everything, Mary Aldour.'

'But Mrs. Stewart was well pleased with my arithmetic, father, and I have the Cocker she gave me as a testimony to my attainments and a guide to farther progress.'

'May be, may be, but she did not tell you that you could be a farm bailie, did she ?'

'But, father, I think I could do something to ease you, if you would let me try a calculation of our expenses, or furnish me with the Inverluig bills.'

'Now, this is past patience,' cried the exasperated Laird. 'Mary Aldour, do you mean to mount into my chair ? You'll be wanting to sit at the sessions next. You're a quick, warm-hearted lass, I'll not deny that, but this proposal is rank arrogance, and an insult to my judgment and authority. To think that I should be insulted by any bairn of mine !'

Mary recoiled as if she had received a blow. To the high-spirited Highland girl the blow which burned on Mary Barton's cheek could hardly outrage and appal the poor factory girl more heavily than this rude rejection of her suit, and harsh suspicion and slander of her motives embittered and frightened the daughter of Aldour. It did not render Mary more wretched about her unhappy interference and its results, that the poor Laird came to her on their next meeting that day, bashfully, and coaxingly, and with misery in his eye, discoursing on indifferent subjects,

and when she was not sullen, but deeply sorrowful and unable to hide it, whispered hoarsely in her ear, ‘I’m grieved that I vexed you, Mally ; will that do to set us right again ? I’m not accustomed to say that I’m in the wrong you ken ; and oh ! my girl, if you were only aware how dearly I hold your mother and you, and how I would grovel in the mire to spare you, I would not need to speak. And Mary Aldour, brave and bonnie as you are, like your mother before you, never kep with a grey beard, or seek to slip your slender fingers into a ravelled hasp ; that is your father’s advice, my dear.’

It was as an odd coincidence to Mary that all these weeks from Christmas to Easter, Finralia was coming constantly to Aldour. He did not appear uninvited ; he never intruded his presence ; he did no more than obey Aldour’s summons and submit to his somewhat oppressive hospitality ; but at last he had grown to be a familiar guest, who could walk in of his own accord without the slightest breach of decorum, nay, with a bare response to Aldour’s pertinacious appeals for his society.

Even Mary came to look upon the gipsy air of Finralia like a Gitano tamed by man, but not taught by Heaven, and to listen to his sardonic Ishmaelitish expression that every man’s hand was against him, though he by royal clemency or deep philosophy might fling up the hand which ought to have smitten every man in return, to walk about with Finralia’s dark eyes upon her continually, as a matter of course.

Now that the year was advancing, Aldour would hurry on its duties and delights, would burn the heather, would wash and clip the sheep, would hold monster fanks, would try otter hunts and fly fishing, and perhaps as an atonement for Mary's exclusion from his business he would perpetually call upon Mary to attend him, and give her opinion, and witness the exploit. Mary was most willing to take this diversion, and to sport her riding-habit morning, noon, and night, but then Finralia was so much with her father—to be sure he burnt no heather, only half washed his sheep, and scarcely took the trouble to recall the wanderers from his neighbours' fanks ; Mary's old charge of avarice against Finralia was every day proved a libel. He was rather neglectful of his own immediate interests ; he employed himself in his public capacity ; he did not waste time or attendance on his possession of Finralia, he did not seem to consider it worth his pains ; he was always irritating Mary by undervaluing and scorning his glen's resources—because, as Mary said, however bad a nest Finralia had been, it was the covert from which his brood had sprung, and it told ill for its owner to vilify it and throw it up. Mary in her logic forgot that the very strong feelings which in healthy development cause pride and fondness for home, may in cases of moral distortion ferment into wrath and hatred.

But the question was, what need had Aldour of Mary for his companion when he was not only willing to accept, but positively demanded, Finralia as his

principal abettor and coadjutor? Why should he drag Mary out beside Finralia until their conspicuous and habitual association in any neighbourhood but that which was intimately acquainted with Mary Aldour and her opinions, would have occasioned ineffaceable scandal?

'Father,' objects Mary, at last on a fine day when her mother was as usual at the loch side with the children, contenting Anne and encouraging Niel, and Finralia was in the porch beyond the hall out of hearing, waiting to examine a fox's earth from which the ravenous 'tod' sallied nightly and wrought havock in the poultry yards and sheep folds, 'what has a girl to do with fox earths? Less than with keeping accounts'—for you see Mary was bold, her temper was not the most perfect bit about her, and that cut rankled in her heart. 'I am going to direct my attention to this satin piece which Anne Macdonald has sent me. I am thinking of quilting half a dozen skirts. I am proposing to practise all the recipes pinned into the cookery book. I have half a mind to get Mackie's Macdonnel to give me a spell of Latin. I am not to be a romp any longer. I am to stay in the house till I get a more delicate complexion. What an example I would afford to the girls! I must pick up as much sedateness as I can before they arrive.'

'But I will be lonesome without you, Mary.'

'You will soon have the girls, they will not weary.'

'Have you wearied, child ?'

'Not exactly ; but my gadding days are nearly over.'

'Oh ! Mally, you must not say that till you are a matron with a house of your own to manage, and a bauld gude man to keep in order.'

'They are not likely to come soon, so I'm preparing to be Aunt Mally to Charlie's establishment. Yes, there has been many an Aunt Mally and Aunt Jenny and Aunt Flory at Aldour, from the old letters upstairs, and not the most useless or lightly esteemed person there either, I can tell you that, father.'

'You are mighty facetious, Mary,' observed Aldour quickly, 'but all in good time ; you must come with me to-day, for I told Roderick Finralia that you were to be with us, and he took the circuit round by the Hanging Shaw on purpose to see if the road there was practicable. Of course we cannot carry you the ten mile road across Pitfadden Moor.'

'Tell him you have changed your mind, and he won't care. It is all the same to him now, whether he came by the Shaw or the ordinary way.'

'Mary Aldour, must I say I don't choose to change my mind, and break my word to a friend, and all to humour your laziness ?'

'Very well, father, very well,' exclaimed Mary rising brusquely ; 'you will see that the people will call me Horse Mary,' alluding to a masculine clanswoman who was not even soft enough to be dubbed of a civil profession or a foot regiment ; 'and whose

blame will it be? I suppose my old plaid and hat will serve for the occasion.'

Aldour laughed awkwardly. 'Mary Aldour, you are a bit of a beauty, and so you busk yourself like a fright; but it's coquetry, my girl, it's all coquetry.'

However, Mary determined to take more decisive measures the next time. 'Father,' she declared firmly, 'you force me to speak out. It is not good for me to be for ever tramping over hill and dale between you and Finralia. No doubt he is not like any other man, and, strange as it may sound, if he had not been an exceptional person I would not have done it so long. If you don't believe me, ask my mother to talk it over with you.'

'No, no, Mally, don't trouble your mother about it; she has enough anxiety with the children,' exclaimed Aldour hastily. 'But,' and as he walked up and down he wiped his hot face with his handkerchief, 'I wonder a young lass like you is not more kind.'

'Kind, father! is it unkind to preserve your daughter's name from odious remarks?'

'Oh! I don't mean to me, Mary; I mean to the lad Finralia.'

'To Finralia, indeed! we have graced him too far already, and I can set your mind at rest, he is perfectly indifferent to anything you, or I, or any other person can say or do. I believe from an epicurean he has passed into a stoic.'

'I don't mind much about the epicureans and stoics,

girl ; it is a long time since old Dominie Macdonald tried to hammer them with other nonsense into my head. I have had other things to remember and forget since then ; hech ! but this I do assure you, that you are vastly mistaken, if you suppose poor Finralia indifferent to aught that you can say or do, although it may not be very deserving of his notice.'

'What ? father, what ?' cried Mary, blazing up into a glow of incredulity, anger, and scorn.

'Child, the fellow is devoted to you—daft, as we say, about your shoe-tie. You have won such a lover as has not wooed in Aldour since auld Eneas Dhu's time. He is as close as a Lowlander, but even Farquhar, when he noticed how he lingered about the place after he had left the house, remarked paukily that he always kept Mary Aldour's side of the building.'

'And if the fellow is so insolent, father, was it your part to tolerate it, or to leave me unwarned ? But I think—I trust—you are mistaken, that I have not been so insulted with your knowledge in Aldour.'

'Oh ! you women, you women, you are mad with pride,' groaned Aldour, 'but take heed, for pride comes before a fall. Girl, he is a pretty man, ne'er a prettier or a wittier in the Country, and he is well to do, though with ill-gotten gear. And what if he has turned from the evil of his father's ways ! What if he abjures the old base mottoes of Finralia for the love of your high head, and scornful neck, and sharp eyes, and biting tongue !'

Mary Aldour could have answered, ‘I want no such homage ; let him repent where repentance is due, to a greater than a fellow-woman ; let him wear the sack-cloth and ashes ; I will not extend to him a little finger,’ but she had already flounced out of the room, leaving Aldour sighing, and muttering, and rubbing his tanned forehead, wandering out and in, answering testily everybody who addressed him, kicking the very dogs out of his way, and retiring at last to his closet and his bureau, and helplessly grasping his hands full of papers—the blithe old Laird a broken man.

It was impossible for Mary and Finralia to meet as before. It was a great discovery to Mary, and although she professed not to credit it, she could never forget it. She had thought for a moment that she would refuse to see him again, that she would not endure his presence, at least in her father’s house, but that would be to expose the discussion, and as if she believed the surmise. Her father was simple ; old Farquhar was a forward old man, who fancied it high time that Mary Aldour should have a suitor of some kind. Oh ! how Mary wished she could settle it in this way, that no horrible corroborations and convictions should start up in her own mind to bear out her father’s humiliating assertion. For Mary felt humbled to the earth. It was her theory that a girl should be able to anticipate and prevent an unworthy suit, that her maidenly dignity, prudence, and wisdom should suffice to crush it in the bud. The notion was not an unreasonable one, and it

was not an untrue one, but then there will always occur these exceptions.

Often and hotly as Mary had pondered her next encounter with Finralia, and planned it to be at once ambiguous in its inferences, and killing in its results, she had never imagined it—as it did happen, or conjecture how thoroughly it would discomfit her intentions, or how far it would carry her purposes.

Mary was running down stairs in the twilight, unaware of Finralia's personality in the sitting-room she was entering, veiled by one of those Chinese papered screens which shut out the draught from the hall. How often these screens afforded ambuscades and *eclaircissements* in old novels and plays! yet not more frequently in fiction than in fact, when they were largely employed in every-day life. One would almost wish them back again in extensive use in these prosaic times, standing where they did to be effectual, right before the sole entrance into the apartment, furnishing a covered passage into the very centre of the gossip, or the more important *tête-à-tête* which performs its part in most histories.

Mary was not very like an eavesdropper, and she did not hesitate a moment after the words fell which half maddened her. ‘Sir, you will not mind her girlish haughtiness and headiness; she is a good woman, Mary Aldour; she will be a noble woman yet, like her mother before her.’

Her father apologizing for her to Finralia, recommending her to Finralia, encouraging, nay, perhaps

suggesting his courtship. Mary walked in after that speech more like an incensed queen than an affronted gentlewoman, and with something spectral too about her, for she did not speak, she merely dropped a shadowy curtsey to Finralia and sank into her seat at her embroidery frame. Poor old Aldour coughed, and shifted his chair, and pushed about the glasses, while Finralia sat still like the formidable statue in black marble which we see on the throne in the '*Arabian Nights' Entertainments*'. He made some demonstration, however. In the first place, he said sharply in reply to Aldour's unlucky phrase, 'You honour me by your confidence, Aldour, but that is a point on which I do not presume to have an opinion ;' and in the second, before he left he approached close to Mary, and while he did not offer to take her hand for the parting salutation, he said distinctly, 'I am not to blame for this, madam ; I have not provoked this.'

Mary was almost beside herself. Reflect that she was a proud, high-bred girl, that she valued her Aldour origin as pure gold, and disdained Finralia's damaged character and his bad name as vile dross ; and here was her father not only bringing her down to Finralia's level, but actually subjecting her to the miserable degradation of being proposed as an object of admiration and regard to any man; so that Finralia should think fit to disclaim his share in the deed. All this extraordinary conduct was coupled with the marked alteration in her father, and darkened by Fin-

ralia's expression, 'I have not provoked this.' How could he provoke it? What had he in his power? Had he a hold over Aldour?

Mary could not rest under these doubts and apprehensions; she could not brook a recurrence of the scene. She was not a common woman, to whom an uncommon resource offered anything insurmountable. She was a true woman, to whom a direct accusation was very natural. She would not approach her father again. Aldour had taken a false step indeed, which had convulsed Mary's loyal heart with distrust and disaffection. She would address Finralia, she would require an explanation from that offender. What was Finralia privy to which concerned the Laird? What influence did he exert over him? What was the origin of their sudden and peculiar association? Did Finralia know what grieved and afflicted her father? She would dare Roderick Finralia to refuse her an answer.

Nothing, no, not passing through fire and water, could prove that Mary was brave and frank in her innocence, like her seeking a private interview with Finralia under the circumstances; conceiving the idea, tolerating it, adopting it, fixing to intercept Finralia on his road to Inverluig, to meet him among the glens and challenge him to speak the truth; and it was not the first defiance that Mary had cast at Finralia.



CHAPTER XV.

MARY ALDOUR MEETS FINRALIA BY THE FORD OF AUCHNAGLAS.

MARY had no great difficulty in putting her resolve into execution, so that she remained firm to her determination. She knew the days when Finralia went to Inverluig certainly, and she was well acquainted with the fords which he must cross on horse or on foot. The only hesitation was, in which mode would he travel, for the two crossings were half a mile asunder. Mary had to depend on her own penetration, and on the guidance of Providence. Yes, though she hardly ever spoke of it, not a woman in the land depended more on Providence than Mary Aldour, or had a more godly habit of seeking divine counsel and relying on divine aid in her own straightforward, practical proceedings. And in the Highlands of that generation a man would pray before he mounted his horse, and a woman before she milked her cow.

The day, though a spring day, was dark and forbidding ; the roads were slippery and muddy, taking

a horse to the fetlock. Mary concluded that Finralia, athletic and active, would bind his plaid round him and walk across the hills, so she took the foot passengers' ford and sat down on the stile behind the hazel bush, hard by the broad, flat rock, where the boat landed its freight, and over against the lonely change-house, which was yet never without custom and comfort, for it was occupied at once by the ferrymen and the tacksman of the few fields won from the heather, and it never wanted home-grown meal for its good oat cakes; milk, butter, and cheese from its little cows; pork and kids' flesh from its pigs and goats; and trout fresh caught from its river; not to speak of grouse snared, and deer brought down at the door without the consent of any keeper. Many a savoury meal was cooked at the Ford; many a piece of news discussed with gusto in proportion to its far journey on a frosty afternoon. Though its boat only transmitted pedestrians, the bridle road on its side of the water leading to the horse and cattle ford dipped down there unaccountably, unless for refreshment; therefore rude carts, and occasionally vehicles of a more pretentious description, were drawn up in the square formed by the peat stack, the hay stack, the manure heap, and the pigsty. On a summer day there were rosy children, the family of the substantial ferrymen, playing about the shafts, and eating their bits of cake and cheese in company with the horses munching their bundles of hay, while the eldest daughter, a buxom, black-eyed lass, in her snood and striped

jacket, from her position of necessity a belle and a coquette—whether demure or hoyden, knitted her stocking and philandered in the sunny air and amidst the blended spell of the peat smoke and the heather, with gallant, amorous carters and drovers, or sang Gaelic songs to them, permitting them to join in the chorus.

Even on this raw, unkindly day, though there were no travellers visible, and the inhabitants of the Ford House kept in their ingle-nook, there was cheer in the air of the house, with its brown and yellow stacks and its sheds behind, and in front the small crab-apple blossoms and straggling white flakes of its sloes, creeping and clinging about the dry stone dyke which surrounded and protected the long kale and leeks. In that garden there were little bunches of lilac pinks, very sweet-smelling and very full of honey ; and, later in the year, the very small white roses which hung for the foolish, faithless Johnny, who forsook them for the great flaunting cabbage-roses which he found in Carlisle town, where he probably left his head at last on one of the ‘Carlisle yetts,’ a horrible blackened bullet, bleaching into a grinning ivory skull. Down these mountain roads, past these change-houses, drinking glad healths and flinging back fond farewells, trooped the Highlanders, not above forty or fifty years before, to fight and to ‘dee’ for Prince Charlie.

Mary went out in the worst weather, so that she could escape from home unobserved, and the sombre-

ness of the day rather favoured her purpose, and rendered her watch more secret and secure. It had rained heavily during the night, and it still threatened wet weather. The mountains were covered with a pall, black with a troubled, frowning blackness, such as only sweeps down in awe and majesty on the hills. Sometimes this pall was swayed with the wind and rent apart, disclosing dripping, steaming, giant figures, like wraiths of the sons of Fingal—the clear brown and green hills of yesterday. At the edge, it was fringed with a white watery vapour, contrasting with the inky hue of the centre of the shape—a shape it was—a cloud-shape vast and tremendous, as the angel with the drawn sword over the city of Jerusalem might have looked to the terrified subjects of the sinful king. Mary sat and studied it as she gazed on the swollen stream, ‘roaring and reaming,’ and rushing along towards the mountain barriers—the gates of the Highlands, to the fertile Lowland vales and populous towns, and to the great sea.

Mary was right in her conviction: Providence blessed her. Finralia suddenly appeared, swinging down the opposite hill out of the mist, as Highlanders swing in their elastic gait, in the quick, steady motion prolonged for hours upon the mountains. Mary saw Finralia, but Finralia could not see her, hidden by the hazel-bush. He came directly down to the river side, and that reminded Mary that Finralia, with all his faults, was a spare drinker. Like Charles XII. of Sweden, when a lad he had been intoxicated, and

while more than half unconscious, he had shared in one of those outrages with which his society still branded him, and for which, to be sure, he had never deigned to record his repentance, unless by the fact that he had then vowed never again to reduce himself to be the sport of his passions, a willingly blinded Samson among the mocking, raging Philistines, and that he had kept his word. But this was not regarded as a virtue in Mary's country ; it only provoked the allegation, that 'Finralia was as thrown about liquor as about everything else in this world.'

Finralia made the usual summons—the halloo and the shout of the Erse word for boat. But Lachlan, the ferry-man, was at that moment in another capacity, taking on a post-chaise, whose driver, unlike Finralia, had no measure in his potations, and who, against all injunctions and remonstrances, had alternately stimulated and soothed himself at the Ford House of Auchnaglas, the first station in his day's work, until he was forced to snore off his draughts on a heap of heather in the corner of the kitchen and drinking-room, while Lachlan, the owner of the change-house and ferry-boat, laid down the gill stoup and oar, and seized the whip to supply his place and appease his aggrieved master ; Ninian, the man, was off on the hills looking after the goats ; there was no one to respond to the appeal but Lachlan's trig daughter, *More*, or Sarah, who accordingly came bustling to unfasten the boat-chain.

Only in the Highlands, on the Norway fords, or the Swiss lakes, would a girl have undertaken such an office, when the water was foaming red over its banks, but More's brown round arms and well-expanded chest were muscular as many a man's. She had no fear of the current; and, without doubt, Finralia spared her on her first progress, taking both the oars in spite of her opposition, and bending his strong, supple body to the task. It was a toil, and it might have been a danger. Had a tree trunk now—and some floated down the stream every flood—struck the boat, or driven it out of its course over some jagged rocks, above the water on ordinary days, where the stones would have ‘gored its sides,’ it would have settled and sunk fast. Had Finralia been stunned and entangled and unable to swim, or dragged down by the girl, then away would have gone Mary's chance of information regarding her father; her longing desire to penetrate the mystery, and substitute pure openness, stout self-denial, for weak, wicked waste, defiled and defiling. But the boat crossed without damage or delay; and Finralia paid his passage-money, and stooped to offer his companion the customary salute. Nay, More was a belle in her generation, and chary of her condescension. She cuffed off even the Laird of Finralia with great briskness and enjoyment. ‘Go away with you, Finralia; myself wants none of your fleeching: ask favours from the ladies—prig them down from Mary Aldour.’

They were just below Mary's self; and her whole body quivered with the proof that the story was abroad, and circulating as a rustic jest among the news of the season, over the bickers and tankards, the bannocks and cold meat at the Ford. Nevertheless, she remained true to her mission.

Finralia uttered no rejoinder to the universal boldness of speech of the Country, and he did not make a second attempt to take his due—a forbearance which probably sunk him fathoms in More's estimation. ‘A braw lad ; a broad-shouldered lad, of a fine presence, not like his wizened, stooping, greedy-eyed father, and who minds more the black name of the Finralias ? but not to try twice for a kiss ! No ; they maun have something on their minds ; they are not canny, these Finralias, after all : they say Miss Ussie Finralia is a perfect ettercap, and for all she's hump-backed and sickly to death, they're never sure of her not hopping in and bursting out upon them up at Finralia.’

The coldness was of a piece with Finralia's sullenness, but it was not quite in keeping with his attribute of hard selfishness that he should linger on the bank watching his late dauntless rower half over, and shouting to her when she took a false reach. But More was nigh back again, and waved her oar as a sign of her independence, in reality, in ireful contempt of her late passenger, who turned and came up the rising ground, preparing to buckle his plaid

afresh for his long, heavy walk ; and then, when they were screened from view, Mary Aldour rose, advanced, and stood before him.

Finralia was not a nervous, excitable man, for Mary had seen him under various colours, without his showing any tokens of perturbation, and now he stood calm and grave, and only his brown cheek glowed as it had done on Ben Falloch, and Mary alluded to Ben Falloch in her very first words—how could he have supposed that it had lingered in her memory as it had dwelt in his ?

‘ Finralia, do you remember the day we climbed Ben Falloch ? I sought your aid then, when I could not do without it ; I am in another strait, and I claim it again.’

‘ You do not need to come here to claim it,’ answered Finralia. ‘ Miss Macdonnel, let me recommend you to return home immediately ; it will be a drenching storm of wind and rain within an hour. You can defer your request.’

‘ You do not say you will grant it,’ cried Mary, quickly, ‘ and this is my time and place ; I will not detain you longer than I can help.’ And she walked away through the screen of hazels and alders. Finralia followed. In a few minutes they were out of the public way, and Mary sat down again deliberately on a large stone. She felt a difficulty in standing, and she wanted to impress upon him that she was cool and determined.

‘ Miss Macdonnel, everything is soaking wet ; let

me put down my plaid for you, unless indeed you want to lay your death at my door,' he added, with emphasis.

Mary could scarcely negative it; she was obliged to submit to his taking off his plaid, folding it, and spreading it out for her accommodation. He remained standing before her with his back to the bushes.

'What ails my father, Finralia? What is changing him, and urging him on to his ruin? What caused him to insult me with a hateful insult?

'How can I tell, Miss Macdonnel?'

'But you can tell, my lad,' cried Mary, almost fiercely, and with the free expression of her time; 'you know something. I charge you as his daughter to tell it to me. I have a right to hear it. I have a right to seek it from any man. I would seek it from any man. As a woman from a man, owning your superior knowledge and judgment, as I confessed your superior strength, I crave it in my trouble.'

'And by what warrant do you expect me to accede to your demand, Mary Aldour, and to perform for you a service which, if it be possible, must be painful?'

'By the warrant of duty and honour, peace and charity, Finralia.'

'What! to a man beyond your pale?' exclaimed Finralia, haughtily.

'I know no pale,' asserted Mary.

'If you know no pale in your creed, Mary Aldour, you know it in your practice. Perhaps you know it

in your creed also, madam, for how do you read the text—"He found no place for repentance, not even with tears?"'

Mary, like most good, clever women, had a mania for theology—not the less strong that it was secret—a passion for solving serious doubts and difficulties. Even in this emergency, and its agitation and pain, she could receive and respond to her enemy's suggestion.

'I don't believe it refers to the salvation of man ; I hold it refers to class privileges—the calling of a separate nation. I am convinced the doctrine has no place in the Christian economy.'

'I am glad of it, madam.'

'What do you complain of, Finralia ?'

'I do not complain, complaints are idle. I state a matter of fact. When my sister Ussie and I thought better of our mode of life, admitted the supposition that our training and precedents might have been in fault—but mind, I don't even complain of my poor forbears, they might have had no better luck than ourselves—when we came out of Inverluig into the glen, and established ourselves, very ignorant, very wild, very shy folk, we found no place for us in the Country.'

'That slight or injury would have righted itself in time, sir. You could not expect to be welcomed to quiet and sober ways with acclamation ; that would be extending a bribe to well-doing. Besides, how did the Country know as much as you have told me this morning ?'

'They were not eager to credit it ; you yourself

were not eager to credit it. It was fortunate that I expected nothing.'

'But I expect something from you, Roderick Finralia; I expect you to perform a man's part by me. I take you at an honest valuation for all you have said.'

'You are arrogant and extortionate, madam.'

'No, I am only fair and firm.'

'Why do you imagine me mixed up in Aldour's affairs?'

'From various causes; from Aldour's commencing an acquaintance, and compelling an intimacy, and, I am not afraid to say so, from late occurrences.'

'And from late occurrences do you suspect that I will abuse any hold that I may have over Aldour?'

'I do not know, and for that matter I do not care; but of this I am sure, that you ought not to have the shadow of a hold over my father. It must be a foolish mistake, a great error; and if it has been rashly occasioned, the sooner it is cleared up and done away with the better.'

'You are not wise to taunt me, Mary Aldour,' declared Finzialia, biting his lips.

'I am not afraid of you, Finzialia.'

'No; I fancy you are neither afraid of man nor devil.'

'I am afraid, sir—of "the world, the flesh, and the devil".'

'Your father will not thank you for interfering with his business.'

' My father may not be the best judge. I say that while I dearly love and honour Aldour.'

' Mary Aldour !'

' What ?'

She did not know why he cried out to her. Then, after a pause, he came nearer to her, and asked, if he solemnly pledged himself to take no advantage of any knowledge or power he might possess, no, not even though Aldour afforded him opportunities, and urged him to the attainment of his end, would that satisfy her ?

No, that would not make the wrong right.

If he swore never again to cross the threshold of Aldour ?

No, what difference could that make ?

He turned away with a hasty gesture of vexation ; he controlled himself, and stood silent, brooding, and gloomy, and then he advanced again, and sat down beside her, as if he had earned a right to do so, although not with the slightest reflection of triumph or gladness ; on the contrary, as if he were a vanquished, yet a stubborn man, who had been constrained to yield out of a kindness to his conqueror.

' Remember, you forced it from me, Mary Aldour ; you compelled me to do what tortured me—I will not pretend to feel otherwise. You may sit there and hear it, it is torture to me to hurt you. Aldour is in debt—I dare say you guess it already—that is not much—he is vastly embarrassed—that is not all : you recollect the trust which he held for Balinacluan's

children ? he has not paid the money—he cannot pay it ; he lifted it many months ago ; he did it when there was no probability of its being recalled, not in Charlie Aldour's lifetime. He did it when it was not a great wrong ; at least, when he supposed he could replace it any day. But all has been failing with the Country—the sale of timber, cattle, and wool has come down immensely. You hear us men constantly lamenting the fall of sticks and starks, and now Balinacluan's grandchild has come to light in the Indies, you know it, and whenever his identity is proven Aldour must reckon with him.'

Mary believed it—conveyed as it was to her, extorted as it was by her, she did not doubt a single word. Oh, the misery of that faith. For the first time in their acquaintance Mary swerved aside and quailed, and covered her face with her hands, yet no blameless man could have been gentler ; he did not look at her, he gave her time to recover herself ; he strove to break her father's fall, to encourage her, as far as his light went, with a prospect of escape from the consequences.

' You do not ask me how I came by the information—how I became aware of the transaction. It reached me in connexion with business ; a payment which Aldour made to me corresponding with the removal of the fund ; a casual admission which led me to suspect that the fund had been removed and applied to his own exigencies ; Aldour's consciousness that he had betrayed his secret. Perhaps I was ready

to leap at the conclusion, and had no objection to find that the rest of the world could fail, that even the best could go astray.'

Mary looked up with white lips. 'I do not believe it, Finralia!—I do not believe that you were so bad as to rejoice that Aldour's fair fame was tarnished!'

'The evil may be averted—the Laird may raise the means of supplying the deficiency; he may avail himself of the assistance of friends.'

'No, no, Finralia; you have no idea that my father will realize the sum which belonged by right to others; and he must enter into no more obligations. A hundred times better sell Aldour, and let Charlie and the whole of us emigrate to the backwoods, as he has sometimes said. Poor Aldour! he would carry at least the name with him; it would be free from blame and shame out there—less imprudent, less aspiring, and offending people have gone before us.'

'You are grieved, and I cannot comfort you; but you take a passionate, violent view of your misfortune.'

'Do I? I do not comprehend it yet; I cannot see it in any other light.'

'Do you forgive me—even me, Mary?'

'I have nothing to forgive—nothing. No, instead, I ask your pardon, Finralia, in my father's name, that I have held myself above you—that I have looked down upon you.'

'Hush! hush! do not asperse yourself as you did long ago at Croclune. I cannot bear it, for you are unsullied as the snow to me, and out of my reach as

the angels in heaven. Now'—he helped her to rise, and did not even retain her hand in his clasp—‘ go home and provide for this care. Would that I could bear it for you. Command my advice and support as you rightly judged, and without a dream of reward. Forget that I have any interest in the matter except the boon of serving you—the greatest that I have gained in my mistaken life. I wish you good-bye.’

He left Mary alone in the cloudy day, and after the space of an hour Mary could walk dizzily into the Schoolhouse not very far away.

‘I have got a chill, Mackie, and my head aches. Will you allow me to sit the rest of the morning in your chimney-corner, and don’t speak a word to me, like a good soul?’

Mackie was almost at her wit’s end to hear Mary Aldour allege illness!—dreaded ague, rheumatism, fever, what not; but so great was her respect for Mary, that she complied with her entreaty, without a single syllable of the torrent of language flowing fast on her breaking bounds. She chased out the children, waved off Macdonnel, and sat religiously guarding Mary’s seclusion, and Mary was very grateful for the respite, and recovered a portion of calmness and strength enough to pursue her way without provoking farther observation.





CHAPTER XVI.

MARY VISITS USSIE AT FINRALIA.

BHERE is no pang to the innocent like the guilt of a friend—no burden like that burden ; the good Lord deliver us from bearing that burden ! But although some women may be fit to turn against the objects they have once loved, and close and bar their hearts against them, such is not the case with pitiful women like Mary Aldour. The reader has seen it was quite different with her when she knew of sin in those to whom she was not allied ; but first knit her to the sinner and Mary might weep great tears for his or her degradation, might suffer agonies on his or her behalf, but she could never untie the knot that had bound them together in happier days. Now, Mary might wish, like the prophet, that her eyes were rivers of water to pour out in a flood for Aldour shorn of his glory, sullied with duplicity and dishonesty in her clear eyes ; for the house of his fathers ; for her mother, herself, and her brothers and sisters, and the entire clan, all concerned in what she had been so proud to maintain—their good name. But Mary had never

in her life been so kind to her father—she made fun with him, the tears in her blue eyes ; she stroked and sorted the curls of his wig with trembling hands ; and poor Aldour could not be grateful enough to Mary for her magnanimity in forgiving and forgetting the extreme provocation he had given her, and proclaiming a truce for the present in the great cause of dispute between them.

Mary was in deep anxiety about her father, passionately intent upon what was best for his lost virtue and peace. Mary had a distinct apprehension of the circumstance to which Finralia had referred. Balinacluan had been out in the disastrous '45, and had subsequently escaped to France. His estate had been confiscated with the mass, but after the anger of Government was appeased, they had permitted it, as in many similar instances, to be bought back by friends in the Country, and held in trust for Balinacluan and his children, and after a time the trust settled largely in Aldour. In course of years Balinacluan died in outlawry, and his children, reared in France, gradually ceased to claim the rents. One died of the small pox, a second fell in the German wars, and the third and last, who had been in contention with the Catholic authorities, from a marriage contracted with the pupil of a religious house, could not be heard of, or in any way traced and put in possession of his income. The rents had been accumulating for years, while researches were made, before the distant and extensively ramified cousins of the exiles were called

together to sit on the lapsed inheritance ; when all at once, within the last twelve months, news of a Simon Balinacluan, established in the Dutch colony of Batavia, had reached Scotland. Papers had been sent home, proving, almost beyond doubt, the lost heir's existence and identity ; little was left to do except to gather a meeting of the few representatives of the old Highland lairds who had united for the protection and relief of their unhappy countryman, and for Aldour to resign his bond, and transfer the lying money to the family of the East Indian merchant, who had long ceased to be a needy man. Aldour had been in greater want of the loose sums coming in to him every season, he had been left to himself when hard pressed—the old Laird, who had been so true, and bluff, and frank, and free—to make use of them, fully expecting to have ample space to restore them before they needed to be paid over to others ; and really, after an interval of thirty years, the lawful owners succeeding poor Balinacluan's missing son were dangerously vague and obscure.

Mary had not told her mother, and she could not communicate with Charlie by letter. She allowed herself time to digest the wretched tidings, to ponder maturely on the future, yet she had a dread that she and Finralia were not alone cognisant of the Laird's broken integrity, and threatened disgrace. When she considered, it appeared to her that both Pitfadden's and Corryarrick's manners had changed towards Aldour. They were not so attentive, or courteous, or submissive, as they had once been, as far younger men ;

they were half-silent, half-loud ; they glanced significantly at each other when he talked of his affairs, and gave signs of mutual understanding and mutual watchfulness over his rash words. They might have been jealous of his old personal weight, and, as Finralia had professed to do, they might have put facts together and arrived at a doubt of the old unquestioned honour. Yet Mary could scarcely think it, in her own candour and generosity.

Mary could not be more humbled than she was, but if a whisper of the truth had spread abroad, it was necessary to take immediate steps to show that they acknowledged their error and were ready to make restoration. Mary could devise nothing beyond consulting with Finralia on her doubts and fears, and Finralia had not been at Aldour since Mary met him at the Ford.

Mary's mind was also disturbed about Finralia. In the midst of her gnawing mortification and sorrow on her father's account, she could think with reluctant but sure self-accusation of Finralia's conduct, and Finralia's plea. Finralia had been manly towards her throughout the interview, and the moment their relations had been overthrown—when she ceased to stand, as it were, with her foot upon him, trampling upon him, and looking down upon him, prostrate, smirched, and stained at her feet—he had been eagerly respectful and kind. She would not have thought that Finralia could have been so kind. Not John Dunglas would have been more considerate. Nay, John Dunglas would not have preserved the

same reticence, would not have evinced so plainly that he relied on her sense and spirit to rally and sustain her, that he depended on her truth and tenderness to endure his story.

It was true what Finralia had let out of himself ; the Country, Mary Aldour especially, had been harsh and barely just to the younger Finralias. She had scarcely thought of Ussie, and when she did so it was with scorn of the abundant anecdotes she had heard of Ussie's unwomanly violence. For Finralia, it had been a part of the pride of Mary's character—as she said, in order to keep the broken from the whole—to refuse to countenance coarse-minded, unscrupulous families like the Robertsons in receiving him into society, and affording him a hope of playing his part among his neighbours. Well said Aldour that pride came before a fall, and that women were mad in the pride of their purity. Where had been Mary's liberality, her mercy? And all the time the person she loved dearest in the world had been waxing and waning from the straight path which she trod with so lofty a step, refusing to permit the poor wayfarer, blinded and astray, launched in life far from her road, to struggle within its gates. Good for her if her power had been limited and her influence small. She was not even so enraged by Finralia's admiration, when she found that he had no idea of winning his prize. She was a little touched by it. Sardonic Finralia, to believe in her ! They said Miss Ussie believed in nothing and nobody ; and that Finralia, though he attended church, was at

least half as incredulous, and yet he had believed in her far beyond her deserts.

With Mary to perceive a fault was to long to atone for it. She thought the best acknowledgment she could make to Finralia's outlawed dignity, was to indicate that she trusted him ; that she had been impressed by his brief protest ; that she was willing to do what she could, though late in the day, to satisfy it. Soon it might be past her ability ; soon they might be severed for ever, out of sight and sound either of offences or good offices. Mary wished to call upon Ussie. She had brought herself to be tolerably indifferent to what the world would say, provided her mother would understand her motives. She believed her mother would give her leave whenever she asked it, and she was certain of Aldour's consent.

Mary did not argue without her host. Possibly, one secret of her mother's entire authority over her when she chose to exert it, was the great independence of opinion and action which she permitted in general in her child.

Mrs. Macdonnel was startled by Mary's speech :—
‘ Mother, I would like to go and see Ussie Fraser of Finralia. There can be no question of desirable acquaintance now, for my father has rendered us quite familiar with Finralia ; and really I think the connexion might be extended to Miss Ussie. She is a great invalid ; she is not pleasant ; nobody looks near her. She may be the better for our company ; and perhaps we should have thought of that sooner,

and afforded it when she first came from Inverluig. Certainly nobody, not even Mackie, has shown herself charitably disposed towards Miss Ussie. No wonder she is a heathen in a Christian land.'

'Mary, child, you should not run on so. We are not accountable for Ussie Finralia. She has her Bible; and if that will not recover her from the old vices of the Finralias, and from their despair, I don't know what will. Neither you, nor I, be sure.'

'Ay, but mother, what becomes of the good Samaritan?'

'I am not certain, Mary, whether it is judicious to permit you to go there. I wish your father may not be too regardless in keeping Finralia so much about the house. Child, there are many mean minds and vile tongues in this world.'

'But will it amend them, mother, to fear them in an honest cause?'

'Certainly not, Mary, and if you thought you could benefit Miss Ussie, or any other poor body in the world, I should hesitate to forbid you from mere dread of scandal.'

'Then don't forbid me now, mother. I was convinced that you would confess it was never too late to perform a duty, or confer a kindness.'

And Mrs. Macdonnel suffered it, partly on account of her own hardy spirit, that feared no malice, partly from the benevolence, now narrowed into one deep, strong stream, which had formerly blown as wide as Mary's, and which supplied her with the ready notion

that Mary was only acting from a fresh impulse of her activity and charity.

The Laird was struck dumb. Could Mary be growing kind to the lad, who, in his solitary pride and defiance, worshipped her at a distance? Women had soft hearts to their suitors, after all; or was this some inexplicable evolution and ebullition of female wilfulness and scornfulness which would distance him yet—anticipate and hasten the exposure of his concerns? The poor Laird groaned anew in his indecision, with the feeling that was so strange and bitter to brave Aldour, the terror that brought the sweat-drops to his brow, and sent his heart knocking against his ribs.

The weather was completely changed. It was a soft, sunny spring day, verging on summer, when Mary walked down the glen of Aldour to the glen of Finralia. The birk-trees were gay and green, the thorns were displaying pearly buds, and in truth ‘milk-white was the sloe,’ while the primroses were giving place to the promise of the roses; the young broods of ducks and swans were fluttering and spluttering in exultation at their early voyages on the lochs, and every bird in Aldour seemed piping to its mate on its nest, or its comrade in the adjoining bush. The sky was high, clear, and blue; the hills were seen in their sharp peaks, their deep recesses, their little rills, another world towering far overhead. It was like the season when Mary, Anne Macdonald, and John Dunglas spent many happy days sporting together in Aldour.

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Mary seemed a girl then, and a woman now.

Unless one has experienced it, there is difficulty in realizing the change from such a scene into one of those dark glens where the sun seems to come not at all, or too late to afford active light and heat ; where the very firs are stunted, and the heather spare ; where the precipices frown, and the breeze blows chill on a balmy summer's day ; where Mary was inclined to listen even at noon for the contrast—

For the wee birdies' song
Wild howlets screaming.

Unless the passage from the blooming and bountiful world into the darkness and barrenness of a railway tunnel, there is no other comparison near it ; and nothing had been done in Finralia to remedy the defects of a pinched situation. The clearings in the pine wood had been made for the convenience of the lairds, and never with a regard to the prosperity of the glen ; planting, so general elsewhere in the Country, had never been tried here ; trees blown down by storms, or undermined by decay, but which had not been cut down by the woodman's axe, and were not fit for the auctioneer's hammer, lay rotting where they had fallen. Not a hut in Finralia was built even of dry stones, or had so much as a wooden chimney ; they were all of black turf, leaning to one side, sinking on their foundations, and sometimes roofless and deserted. Their patches of corn, running down to the Finralia water, were on ground so undrained, that after the late rains they looked more like sub-

merged Indian rice crops than crops among the mountain pastures ; bleak was the ground, and shrill was the cry of the plover sailing over it.

These homes were the roughest in the district ; their few cows were lean specimens of the herd ; their sheep were ragged in the still unwashed and unclipped fleeces, and broken and battered in the horns ; their women and children staring at the stranger, though not gaunt-eyed, were wild in look, air, and dress, uncouth, disorderly, reckless in habits—the fruit of old lawless practices, and long neglect on the part of both leaders and people.

Would Aldour ever become like this doleful glen ? Mary asked with a shudder ; for she believed that Aldour must go out of their family. Aldour which belonged to the sons of Coll, before St. Columba and the Chuldees anchored among the isles, and showed the clansmen a better, even a heavenly inheritance. But as to considering the details of the separation, Mary no more attempted it in the meantime than suppose a dim, horrible impression made upon you, that you must without reprieve lose a cherished limb, you would be able to prepare yourself for the operation by deliberately regarding the rent sinews and the severed bone.

There was the House of Finralia as dark and chill, as weather-stained and forlorn as everything else in the glen ; the old, rugged, dismantled castle, with its gaping holes for windows, and its rank weeds and young seedling alder-bushes shooting from holes and

corners, and the modern building all mouldering and defaced, without an attempt to renew and preserve it ; the paint worn from the doors and windows, the panes in those of the upper story broken and left unmended, the shutters here and there half closed, the door-step a litter of straw and kitchen stuff ; a kennel on one side and the stables on the other, all half-ruinous, all in the most slovenly state ; hard nature and slow decay fighting for the bone over the abode of an able man in his prime, like Finralia, and a single woman, a dweller at home, like Miss Ussie. It would be a great odds if a pair of sugar-tongs* were the greatest want in that country house.

Mary Aldour was used to primitive ways, but she had never seen such an example of the same as at Finralia, and she had never been saluted by such a chorus of lowing cattle and barking hounds as when she entered the yard. She was tempted to credit that the place was given up to animals—if they resembled its other accompaniments, probably more savage than domestic, till first one and then another woman servant scuddled before her from the various outhouses into the main door. Mary was well acquainted with the bare feet, the linen jacket, and the snooded hair, which so astonished English travellers as the guise of female service in the North ; but their girls at Aldour were comely, neat, and pleasant attendants, while these wenches of Finralia seemed scarcely denizens of the civilized world. After all,

* Boswell remarks on the absence of a pair of sugar-tongs in a house which Dr. Johnson visited.

little self-respect could be expected from the retainers who placed themselves under the rough, wayward rule of Miss Ussie, and shared the bad name of the Finralias, though the household, as it was constituted now, was still and melancholy enough to be monastic in the character of its rigid seclusion and unbroken routine.

At last, as Mary listened to the harsh discord of the cracked bell breaking in on the surrounding noise, an elderly woman, hastily shaking out a cap with ribbons on her head, and a clear-starched apron over her skirts, bustled to the door and received her ; a thin, wizened, grey-headed woman, with a furrowed brow, a weak mouth, and an anxious eye, a foolish, superstitious body, oppressed by her charge and excited by any novelty, yet a simple, kindly-looking soul enough —a relic of a merit of the feudal system—a better-bred individual who had clung to the Finralias, borne with their violence, attended their dismal death-beds, nursed Miss Ussie, waited on Roderick Finralia, something from the force of custom but much more from hereditary love and fealty. She addressed Mary eagerly, and without any prudent or polite reservation : ‘ You’re welcome to Finralia, Mary Aldour ; we’ve been long looking for you and the like of you, and we would have been better red up in your honour but myself had mostly lost heart and hope. Yes, come ben and see Miss Ussie, she’s in great need of your company. Between us two, how could she help her silly, humoursome, honourable mother, and herself coming into the world with a

broken back, and with a spark aye ready to light in her temper? And Finralia, what choice had the lad, with your leave, but that of being a wild Satan? He that was nursed among dicing and drinking, for the lady was so cankered that the very bairns were not safe with her, that were they not, and he not a billie to bide in the housekeeper's room, a bonnie gipsy boy, Mary Aldour! but we're all orderly now, and Finralia's very kind to Miss Ussie, and he feeds the folk and lets a-be, and what more can be asked of a big, pretty man, that's hopeless, his own self?

A hopeless man! strong and sagacious Finralia hopeless in his wisdom and might. It sounded marvelously to Mary.

'Why should Finralia be hopeless, Mistress Minnie?'

'Deed am I, Mary Aldour, I'm Mistress Minnie, while the lave are but Jean, and Flory, and Babby, and Katie. I was the foster sister of auld Finralia; himself was my own *chaolt*, though a hantle older than I. My father was his bailie, and rode as his henchman in the years of the wars, eh—but we'll hold our whisht on that—and my poor man was my father's successor. You have mighty keen eyes, madam.'

'Finralia has no incurable malady, why should you describe him as hopeless?'

'Eh! Mary Aldour, there's no malady like sin, and though we've turned from the evil of our ways, and

are doing our best to repent now, is it not visited unto the third and the fourth generation? You ken little of that, Mary Aldour. Madam, it is a sore knowledge. This is Miss Ussie's chamber.'

They had been steering through the wide, low-browed, gusty black entry, black with age and black with utter desolation, when Mistress Minnie lifted the latch of a door and flung it open, performing the ceremony of introduction of her own accord in unceremonious but consequential accents: 'Miss Ussie, lass, the gentry are come to speer for you; here's Mary Aldour, no less, at your back.'

Mary could not help pausing on the threshold. The room was hot, and dusty, and pungent, in the midst of its eccentric accessories and adornments, and that serio-comic inscription of a perverse, passionate heart's yearning after regard. Birds in cages, dogs and cats, generally on amicable terms with each other, unless under express grounds of provocation, that poetic pet, a tame fawn, stretched on a rug, perfectly familiar with the other inhabitants, were Ussie's companions. Her work lay around in every shape on looms, frames, and shuttles, with their materials of fitful industry at all stages of progress, down to such delicate work as groups of flowers in cut paper and quaint models of animals in wax, the accomplishments in which Anne Macdonald excelled. Certainly Miss Ussie was not idle in her confinement, neither did she appear to be altogether profane, for such an old-fashioned pocket Bible, Morocco-bound and silver-clasped, as those

which bridegrooms presented to their brides—as that in which Montrose's name is written with a classic motto, and a French flourish—was among her litter. And Mary soon found that Miss Ussie by no means disbelieved the sacred volume ; she only supposed that she, like the prophet Elijah, was left alone to bear witness to its contents, above all, to its denunciations against the pride and pomp of life, and the vanity of the flesh. Not another creature in the great world showed forth any good, unless her brother, the Laird of Finralia, her darling Rory—Miss Ussie's sole earthly stay and idol—and even Finralia was contumacious, and had evinced clearly enough in his youth that his feet were of clay.

Miss Ussie herself was in the centre of her domain. She was a little emaciated being, to whom Mistress Minnie was corpulent and gross. In nothing did she resemble Finralia except in the dark grey eyes, but in Miss Ussie these were associated with red hair and a wan and bluish whiteness of skin, while he was brown and swarthy in complexion. As a peculiarity of her look, she had that old and unearthly air which will attend upon deformity even when the expression is otherwise fresh and guileless. She was dressed in an old-fashioned style, but with extravagant richness and parade, and the stiffness and brilliance of her brocade, the string of pearls round her throat of a throat, the clasps on her slender arms, increased the outlandishness of her appearance. No wonder that the poor Highlanders were half persuaded that Miss

Ussie was either a witch or an imp. Her greeting to Mary was far from tranquillizing.

‘So, Mary Aldour, you’re come to spy Miss Ussie of Finralia?’ she cried shrilly. ‘Is she as hideous and contemptible as your mark? Is your curiosity fully satisfied, and is your self-conceit finely flattered—two dogs greedily killed with one stone?’

Strange as it sounds, Mary had never seen Miss Ussie in her life before; and while she thoroughly believed at this moment that she would pinch the maids and clutch them by the hair, and fling the furniture out of the window, and burn the books, and shut the door on both minister and doctor, as had been reported, Mary was rather overpowered on her own account how to rebut the sudden and wicked accusation; she could only advance and say, ‘Your servant, Miss Ussie,’ and curtsey.

‘Oh, fie, Miss Ussie!’ cried Minnie, passing adroitly behind her mistress’s chair, but proving at the same time that there was another tongue in the world besides Finralia’s that dared hold Miss Ussie again. ‘How can you behave so badly, and scold Mary Aldour the very first word? I’m black affronted. Finralia will be fit to bite his tongue out of his head.’

‘And how dare you hint that Finralia will let another person come between him and me, Minnie?’ cried Ussie, facing round upon her ancient retainer and blazing with a white heat. ‘A strange woman, Mary Aldour, that holds him as dirt beneath her feet.’

‘That is not true, Miss Ussie,’ said Mary, boldly;

'we may have been odious to each other, but Finralia has rendered me a service, and I am come here to acknowledge it.'

Ussie was silent at that—clenching her thin hand, and glancing furtively with her green grey eyes at the stranger ; at length she broke out again—

'I've heard much of you, Mary Aldour ; but you're not to my mind—a maypole of a lass with a lint top, and blue beads for een !'

'May-be my looks are the worst of me,' cried Mary, with a troubled inclination to laugh.

'Is that to take off my infirmity ?' demanded Miss Ussie, rekindling into wrath.

'Na, now, Miss Ussie,' protested Minnie, holding up her hands in despair ; 'I do not ken what to do with you—yourself's an unreasonable woman—you're neither to hold nor to bind—with your leave, nothing will please you. Here's Mary Aldour walked down two glens to speer for you at last, and you ken yourself how you've treated her. No wonder you fear folk out of their wits. But never mind Miss Ussie, madam, she's not telling the truth about your person, for she has a fine eye for beauty has Miss Ussie—she'll be wakening me many a time in the night after this visit to tell me, "Eh, Minnie, I've seen a vision straight as a willow wand and rosy as the June flowers, like Mary Aldour." 'Deed, she will do that, and that will she do. Eh, Miss Ussie, what reckoning will you render to Finralia, who gangs freely

to Aldour on his own footing, of your conduct this day ?'

'I'll settle with Finralia,' said Ussie, sullenly.

'See, Mary Aldour !' cried Mistress Minnie, perseveringly, as she lifted up a sheet of flowers cut laboriously with scissors from paper—a practice in vogue so far away as the English Court—and pointed to a soft mass of wax which Miss Ussie had just manipulated into a lamb couchant, cropping grass and moss, and ingeniously displaying at once all its four legs and its tail, and which still soft in material was set down to harden, 'are not these bonnie things ? Finralia procured her but one pattern of each, and our Miss Ussie can create hundreds of divers kinds. Eh, if she would only be a quiet, contented lady, amazing the Country with the skill and the craftsmanship which the Lord has given her in place of bodily comeliness and strength.'

Mary ventured to examine them. 'They are very good—they are charming ; my cousin Anne Macdonald could not execute them with so much correctness and elegant fancy.'

Ussie smiled grimly ; then all at once, before anyone could anticipate her action, caught up a pair of scissors, snipped the elaborate bunch of thistles, blue-bells, oak-leaves, and grasses through and through, and with her other hand seized the wax lamb and crushed it into a shapeless lump, and laughed so mocking a laugh at the destruction that Mary started

back aghast, telling herself, ‘The poor creature is demented, and my presence is infuriating her beyond bounds.’

But Minnie still persisted in lecturing her nursling as a clever, ill-conditioned child, who was perfectly accountable for her naughtiness, putting her apron to her eyes in sincere vexation in the pauses of her discourse.

‘Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! Miss Ussie, are you at your cantrips before Mary Aldour’s face ? when I hoped you would show your nurture, and behave like a lady. I ken you do it on purpose to plague me. I believe you make the toys of perishable wares, just that you may please yourself with the cruelty of wasting them before myself that takes such delight in them, because no a lady in the land, no a strong bonnie lady can manufacture the like. Ochone ! Miss Ussie, you’ll not vex my auld een long ; you’ll gar them close before’s time. Then nobody will mind your maggots but Finralia, and you’ll drive him out of the Country or into his grave after me, poor gentleman, and you’ll have the place to yourself, and then you’ll be pleased, Miss Ussie.’

‘How can you say so, Minnie ?’ remonstrated Ussie, in an angry whimper. ‘What need you care for a trifle ? There ! I’ll make you a dozen the morn, and an ash-tree, and a hen and chickens, and you can take them away out of my gate, and lock them in your drawer, Minnie. It was you hurt me, pointing them out to Mary Aldour, as if they were gude

gear, in the room of my wants and sorrows ; and she standing there, healthy and blooming, and condescending to praise them.'

'I am sorry, Miss Ussie, that I have vexed you,' exclaimed Mary, gravely ; 'I did not mean it ; but though I have great blessings, which you are denied, still you need not gnash your teeth at me, Ussie-Finralia ; for oh ! woman, I've a sore heart of my own !'

Mary spoke partly in protest against Miss Ussie's wild jealousy, partly sick at her violence, partly from the fulness of her own heart.

Ussie stopped short in rolling up her lace apron, and looked at Mary wonderingly. 'Is it true, Mary Aldour ? But, my lass, you would not change with me. You would not be the fule to take the hump on my back for the crook in your lot. Na, na.'

'I believe I would,' cried Mary bitterly, as a flood of memories swept over her, and she struck her hands together. 'Oh ! it's yes, yes, Ussie Fraser ! I would accept your bodily affliction, so that I could lay down my mental pain.'

'If a fairy heard you !' exclaimed Ussie, cunningly ; 'but no,' she substituted with sudden seriousness, and far more feeling than could have been expected from her distorted and jaundiced disposition, 'I will not laugh at you. I'm friends with you since you're in trouble, and you're not so used to it as me. Poor woman ! Take a seat, Mary Aldour, and with your leave I will show you all my tatting, and knotting, and tambour work, and weaving, which is better worth than

that nonsense. We'll confer together like two ladies of the Country, as we might have done had I been hale, and had there been no feud between the Finralias and the lave. But the feud is quenched now, madam, and Finralia, my dear Roderick, is about to be a prince in the North. He is so wise, and strong, and sure, that though he serves Pitfadden, Pitfadden maun submit to him in weighty matters ; and Finralia minds none beside, but only the Crown. He's above being scraped and bowed to ; but mind my words, Mary Aldour, you will see Roderick Finralia the head of the Country yet. They aye said in Finralia that a chief would arise who would pay off our scores. They've long held us at the wall because we were a lawless race ; but now we're gathering wit, we're catching them in their own toils ; we're as eydent and canny as the best of them ; and see if the Finralias will not beat in peace as in war, when they set their hearts to it.'

Mary was willing to humour Ussie ; nay, for that matter, she had no objection to the Finralias taking to diligence and steadiness, only she thought these qualities should begin at home.

Minnie was very triumphant, but nearly overturning the scales, fast rising to good humour, by her incautious praise : ' You're a bonnie lady now, Miss Ussie. Myself kent you would mind yourself, and mend your manners. None guesses the goodness at the bottom of your throbbing heart but me and Finralia.'

Miss Ussie knit her red brows, screwed her

mouth, and put up her shoulder. ‘ Go away, you fule, Minnie ! You ken ! What do you ken ? That I’m as ugly as sin ; and that in place of goodness at the bottom of my heart, I look down there and I see the bottomless blackness which the Irishman wrote of. Wot you of him, Mary Aldour ? ’

Mary answered surely she was intimately acquainted with Lilliput and Brobdignag.

Miss Ussie was won to pleasanter and safer laughter. ‘ Books used to be my kingdom, till I found that my subjects there wounded me too. So I burned them, like the acts of the black art ; but I liked his books next best to the Bible—they suited me and Finralia. Yet I fear he was a godless man, in his lust after pre-ferment, as who is not in our evil days ? ’ After this Miss Ussie talked much more like a rational being, and even testified glimpses of a generous spirit, and an appreciation of what was grand and good, along with an overweening ambition; all shivered and scintillating, like the light in the bits of a broken mirror. Yes, mad Miss Ussie could expatriate not only with discretion but with fervour on truth and holiness, though she believed it fled from her time and her Country ; as, while on other occasions she raved, and stamped, and tore with these nervous hands in her fits, she would also bestow on her astonished, maltreated maidens loads of valuable goods—webs of cambric, cards of lace. Mary could hardly prevent Ussie from forcing upon her some of these gifts by the subterfuge of borrowing the pattern of what Miss

Ussie prized most of all her work—a spider's web pair of ruffles which she was weaving for Finralia, in store for his presentation at Court—‘For he'll stand before the King ; and do you not think, Mary Aldour,’ suggested Miss Ussie, now in great graciousness, ‘Rory is like a king himself, conquering his bad beginning, and laying the foundation of a new name ?’

Mary did not answer, for Finralia himself entered at this moment, and even his coolness was not proof against the spectacle : Mary Aldour in Ussie’s den ; Mary beside Ussie ; the sunshine cheerful, healthful, pure, staunch, struggling against the coming storm, beside the dark, noxious, delusive, and shifting shade.

Finralia expressed no astonishment, but some little anxiety. ‘What will you think of our establishment, Mary Aldour? But it is a great deal too bad to be apologized for. Minnie was right to bring you into Ussie’s room ; the rest of the house may have fewer tenants, afford more space, and be more according to rule and precedent, but it is scarcely so enlivening, that is, if Ussie has received you remembering how her brother has gone to Aldour, and how you have honoured us by this visit,’ he said hastily, with an inquiring glance at Ussie, who hung her head. She had great respect for her brother, that was plain, either through the natural power of his character, or through her exceeding fondness for him, which monopolized the tenderness of a heart capable of unselfishness and devotion.

'Miss Ussie has been kind,' said Mary, sedately; 'she has forgiven my intrusion, and accepted me as a friend; and if she will allow me to come and see her on a future occasion, I will not trespass further upon her patience at present.'

To run away the moment he came in; that was sufficiently expressive both to Ussie and to him. But as Minnie had retired, Mary could not prevent him from becoming the master of the ceremonies to his disorderly house and policy—escorting her to the door, across the yard, and down the glen—walking beside her bareheaded, with his bonnet in his hand, as a chief to a distinguished guest—as he had never yet accompanied any woman.

Mary did permit it. If he had known it, it was what she wished and intended should happen; she would have been grievously disappointed if she had missed him on this occasion, though there was not much flattery in the impulse; and Mary, in her zeal, general philanthropy, and particular absorption in her father's cause, might be leading this wise man a pretty dance. He had never dreamt that she would be walking with him thus down his glen of Finralia, which she then and there flooded with brightness and warmth. It was an immeasurably greater event to him than to his wild people looking after so strange a sight as the Laird and a lady, Finralia and Mary Aldour! And this happening in broad day, which might never have been dreamt of in dark night, he might not, with all his reason and firmness, be able

to resist, the fantastic imagination that she might walk with him yet another time, and in another fashion, in his despised Finralia, though all the while he had a deadly consciousness, that her very appearing in his glen at this date was a fatal sign to his passion.

Mary mentioned her father immediately, though with burning cheeks; spoke rapidly but firmly of her fears. Yet what should she fear farther? They would lie to no man. Aldour must go; the confession of the wrong should be made, and the settlement of the affair accomplished immediately. Oh! that it could occur this very moment, though the Laird's head were bent with shame; better a righteous shame than a false honour. They had sinned, and they had repented, and they would be pitied and forgotten.

Finralia could not deny that Pitfadden and Corryarrick might have their suspicions. Generally a man's own family and friends were the last to be well informed on such occasions; but he combated the relinquishment of Aldour—the immediate restitution of the entire fund. It was a troublesome and inviolous trust, a strong temptation; and Aldour had been deceived by an erroneous impression of the possible lapse of the sum after a long interval into the hands of the holders. Was not Aldour related to Balinacluan? and the whole deed was informal—there might be, there must be, a compromise.

Mary was very high in rejecting the proposal. Did he think they would make a compromise of truth

and honesty, and take refuge in a wretched quibble ? No, Aldour had been trusted, and he had failed ; the more entire the trust, the more miserable the failure. Let them admit the whole, and give up everything ; it was all they could do now for the honour that was so dear to them.

“ All is lost save honour.” You will quote that phrase with one of your heroes, and you will be consoled.’

‘ No,’ Mary admitted, frankly ; ‘ I never expect to be consoled in this world.’

‘ It will wring all your hearts to give up Aldour, although its money value is not above a commandant’s income, and I would not give a pinch of tobacco for this horrible Finralia. Yet I believe I must retain it to my dying day.’

‘ Then make the best of it,’ said Mary, solemnly, as she paused to part from him, ‘ as you will answer for your talent. Miss Ussie has a great fancy that you will yet win renown, let it be for causing the wilderness to blossom like the rose. Think of it, Finralia.’

‘ It is too late, Mary Aldour, and I am not the man for the deed.’

‘ It is never too late in time, Roderick Finralia ; and how do you know that you are not the man called and chosen—your very misfortunes and defects your title ? A great Apostle preached the faith which once he destroyed. Your fathers have smitten, and you may heal ; they have cast down, and you may build up. See to it, Finralia ; it would be a glorious crown.’

Finralia stood where she had left him.

A glorious crown! A crown of thorns at which the craven daws of this world would peck, and which would sit on lonely brows, for she would never share it. She wore another crown—a crown of honour and good deeds—a crown of the faith and love of generations, which this flower of honesty once plucked from the chaplet of Aldour and trodden in the mire would not mar, for it would be immediately replaced, and united with another, the sweetest of all—the violet of humility, which, to tell the truth, had been hitherto somewhat lacking from Mary Aldour's fresh and fair garland. Not that it had been altogether absent, but rather a bud undeveloped and overshadowed, for Mary's was too noble a nature not to have real poverty of spirit, self-forgetfulness, self-sacrifice, ay, and self-condemnation at its foundation.





CHAPTER XVII.

ALDOUR BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

COME, father, let us have a stroll down the glen this fine gloaming.' And Aldour went, unsuspiciously remarking on the size of the lambs nibbling the young grass, and the trout leaping up in the loch, and the little river with its floating veil of mist. Mary wished this veil thicker, wider ; she wished the early summer's dusk deeper. Yet it was good as it was. She would not have liked the broad day and the bright sunshine for her errand. Not that she could not have borne them ; she would have borne anything for the sake of righteousness.

'We will go in and see the Stones, father, and we will hear the blackbirds better there ; I am sure there is a pair singing in the ivy on the wall.'

Aldour was reluctant, but he complied again in his constitutional indolence and obliging habits. He entered with Mary the ancient churchyard of Aldour, one of those old churchyards without the vestige of a church, which one encounters in the Highlands. The

Macdonnels of Aldour had been buried in one stoned and storied corner since the spot had a Christian name. It was a graveyard which would have seemed very neglected and forlorn in a peopled district, but whose long grass and broken hillocks were in keeping with the solemn, solitary hills.

The gate was locked ; but Mary and Aldour entered by a convenient gap in the mossy, overgrown wall ; and just after they had taken the liberty, evening though it was, a little company advanced to the gate. The beadle turned the key, and rolled it back on its rusty hinges, and the minister—the only man in black in the group—led the way to an open grave. The mourners were very rustic ; and they had travelled far, carrying, turn by turn, their sad burden. They were in their ordinary dyed tartan coats and trews, and the pall over the plain deal coffin was a plaid. They had come from a distant glen, and were unknown to Aldour and Mary, who stood reverent spectators of the scene. The last rites were paid, and heads were bowed and bodies bent in the bitterness of the farewell that owned no outward lamentation, only the old original inner mourning for their dead ; and then they departed again on their long journey, under the young moon, over the hills and moors.

The minister came forward with a courteous word to his acquaintances, the Aldours ; but he did not tarry with them, for he had been engaged all day superintending the field work of his glebe, and he had been interrupted in the first period of his delayed

sermon, and had it weighing heavily on his worthy conscience.

Mary and Aldour were left alone again with the old stones, tufted with lichen and feathered with ferns as they only are in the Highlands, and with the trodden turf and black mould by the newly-filled grave, all in the abiding shadow of the mountains on the summer evening.

'Don't you think it is dismal here, dear?' objected Aldour, with a shudder running through his stalwart figure, and a haggard care on the face which had once been so careless in its kindness.

'No; only lulling to sleep—the long last sleep. Hark to the blackbirds! father, they don't find it dowie any more than the garden at the House. This is God's garden, and we must not leave it without visiting the plants which He has in store for us, lying still in His earth till the Great Day,' and Mary moved carefully along among the little stones, muttering, 'My ghost, O, Connal, is on my native hills, but my corse is on the sands of Ullin.' 'Ghosts fly on clouds and ride on winds; they rest together in their caves, and talk of mortal men.'

They reached their own quarter: there, without rail or barrier, with their people like leaves strewn at their feet, rested the house of Aldour, and many an offshoot from Eneas Dhu, the black sheep, or wolf in their fold, to Aldour's father and mother, and Mary's baby brother; and there Aldour had hoped to lie, and gallant, dauntless Mary, unless, indeed, she were grafted

into another family, and borne to another churchyard or solitary burying-ground among the changeless hills which had seen so many laid low, and would watch over so many more returned to their kindred dust, like the bread and wine once used for sacramental purposes, let it blow where it listed, sacred dust for ever.

Aldour stood stiff and cold, gazing upon the simple monuments of his fathers—that honoured Laird or brave soldier; this pious Lady, the mother of numerous, obedient children. Of the maidens, indeed, in their withered age, and their budding youth, only the names and years were recorded: with austere signification of woman's sole calling as man's spouse and parent, they carved no line to her lot apart from husband and son.

Mary stood close to her father. Although she had denied it, probably the situation had some influence on her too; though it was but an ordinary little burial-ground—a few crumbling stones above and mouldering bones below, and a rose-tinged summer sky above the whole. There was a tremulousness in her clear voice as she said, ‘Their troubles and sins are all over, father; even Eneas Dhu's guilt, God be praised! may have been washed out in the blood that once flowed on a cross like that which stands at his head—the only cross which the Reformation spared in the kirk-yard of Aldour. May you and I, father, lie safely beside them.’

Aldour groaned a weary, heart-struck groan, and

turned, as if he could stand the spectacle and reflection no longer. But Mary clung to him: ‘Oh, father, dear father, don’t depart till you’ve cast off the thick clay clogging your steps, and dragging them to this place, but not in peace, Aldour, not in honour.’

‘What do you mean, Mary?’ asked Aldour sharply, stopping short, and gazing at her with a purple flush on his face. ‘What do you dare to imply?’

‘Father, I dare to do it in the shadow which God’s church once made, and by the graves of our fathers. You have erred, father, and the shame is upon us—not in my eyes, and, oh! who would shield a father but his daughter? Would that I could have buried the knowledge of the sin in the deepest grave that was ever dug, and never breathed it to your lightest hearing till it was cancelled yonder like theirs here, who never raise their voices between us, although they have such an interest in our history. Finralia knows—’

Aldour started violently. ‘And he can save or destroy us all, girl; you must be aware of that, if you are informed of my—my unfortunate embarrassments and encumbrances. If I were an old chief of Aldour, I would wed you to that man though I dragged you before the minister by the hair of the head,’ cried Aldour, bullying her in his degradation and anguish.

‘No, father; you may think that for a moment, but the next I would be your Mally, whom you would not raise a finger to hurt, whom you would rather die disgraced than sacrifice.’

'Ay, ay, Mally, I'm a weak man, and you know it, lass, and you might spare me,' and the poor Laird, behind his spread hands, cried before his child.

'It is not to spare but to save you, dear father, dear Aldour. Oh ! you don't know what I would not do for you ; sure I would die for you if I got the chance. But I would not wed Finralia ; it would be another sin ; it would be to consummate a wrong ; it would do no good. The world will not be deceived. Corryarrick, and Pitfadden, and the rest of them, will learn how you have misapplied the money. Make a clean breast of it, father. Lay down false credit ; say, "I have sinned and I am punished." Sell all, and pay young Balinacluan and his folk promptly, or else they will pretend that you knew of his existence and his locality all the while ; they will believe you professed ignorance of his fate, and tampered with intelligence.'

'Oh ! Mary, Mary, don't heap horrors upon me. You are hard, like your mother ; and oh, heaven ! your mother does not know, and I cannot tell her. It is easy to say "Sell, sell :" there is not enough sticks of wood, though the glen were clean shorn of all that the Laird, my grandfather, planted, to bring the half of the payment in these markets, and the wool will not suffice for the household expenses. I tell you, Mary Aldour, I cannot pay, though the beagles should come upon me ever so fast, unless I borrow or beg, and where from I have not the most distant idea ; perhaps you, who are so wise, may suggest a quarter,' ended the poor Laird ironically,

not without a bitter-sweet sense of relief in the worst being known, and the perilous stuff long pent up in his bosom let loose, and inclined to indulge in strange particulars rather than dwell on the grievous fault which had landed him on this rocky shore of difficulties. ‘Your cousin, Anne Macdonald, is not of age for another year, and there is no use applying to her South-Country relations and guardians; John Dunglas is out of the Country, and I am no hand at a letter, and I could not communicate my need in a letter. Old Dunglas is donnered—as dead to business as if he were in his coffin; I’ve wished many a time of late that I were in mine.’

‘I believe you, father, but it would only be to leave the explanation and the reimbursement to poor Charlie. You would not impose that on your son any more than you would transfer the wrong back, if you could, to your father.’

‘To my father, woman! The old Laird in his flowing wig, and velvet coat—the most stately, truth-speaking gentleman in the Country, a match for Sir Evan himself, who gave the lease of the Inverblane Farm, the best of the land, at a shilling the acre, because the tenant pleaded a half promise in jest, who would not touch a penny of my mother’s tocher if her sisters did not share and share alike with her. Though we are disarmed I would shoot the man this minute who would presume to hint that Aldour my father would have acted as I have done.’

‘Then, father, show by a mighty effort that though

you swerved from his truth it was not strange to you, it was the dearest part of your inheritance. Think no more of props and stays (which you admit you could not attain though you would), to hide your weakness. Be manly as you ever were.

An error owned
Is half atoned.

At the last—sell Aldour.'

‘Sell Aldour, Mary !’ cried the Laird, and his voice sank into a husky whisper. ‘ Whisht, you daft lass, whisht ! The auld lairds will rise out of their graves before your face.’

‘They’ll never stir for mortal gear, father ; gold or land will never break their rest, never plague them more. If aught could move them, surely it would be the loss of honour, for they were honourable men of their kind. Father, it has been our greatest pride to think them so.’

‘But the glen, Mary, the people ; would you forsake the one and leave the other without a head ? I doubt you are cold-hearted, my girl, after all your work among them.’

‘God is their Father ; I would ask his protection for them ; I could never seek it for me and mine so long as I persisted in doubledealing and unjust profusion. We cannot live as we have done, Aldour, we cannot be as we have been, without gathering a heap of poverty and humiliation against the day of trial, which will come and will not tarry. Oh ! traffic no longer

with falsehood, sir, that is far beneath you. Do not treat our position as if it were a dream and not a reality. We have not means for our habits in these changed times. You have been driven to contract a debt unworthily, but, thank God, it can still be worthily paid. Surely, father, we can be happy alone, and comfortable without profusion. These are artificial, luxurious customs ; try, dear sir, to see them as the shirt I read about to you in Mr. Brooke's "Fool of Quality," all over with laces, and with rufflings, and with beads of glass, which, when poor Hercules wore it, sent poison both into his body and into his mind, and brought weaknesses and distempers into the one and the other. And the story goes on to say, he grew so fond of it, that he could not bear to have it put off ; for he thought that to part with it would be to part with his flesh from his bones. But that was a great mistake, you know, father, and in place of being his safeguard it proved his destruction. You cannot maintain the delusion. You cannot, father, though you wish it. My mother will stand out the moment she penetrates it.'

'And I have done it all, and it should have been my son's, as it came to me. I have robbed Charlie and ruined the whole of you, ay, and dishonoured you. But, oh, Mally ! can you think of no other way but this ?'

'None, father, none that would remove the stain from your conscience, and enable you to travel to the West a broken-hearted but upright man, to bear our

dead company, in body and in spirit, without fear and horror. Oh! I think they will forgive the loss of the land if you will restore and preserve their good name. And if they are fallible, still there is One who will judge righteous judgment—the Author and Finisher of our Christianity, father, whom men were taught to obey in this very place—the Lord of men and angels—he will forgive the loss of the glen, if it is given for the everlasting principles of his righteousness. I am thankful that Aldour is not entailed, and that only my mother's fortune must pass to the younger children, as you have told me. I repeat it, I am glad, for the sake of both the living and the dead, for what I believe they held and hold dearest of all—virtue and religion.'

'Ochone! Ochone!' groaned the Laird, drearily, like the Highlanders on that misty morning at Culloden, 'the battle is lost because I was so left to myself as to deal one unfair stroke. Oh! how could I have been so possessed, child? And now, indeed, there is nothing left for me but to hide my head and die.'

'Father, do you not think rather the fight is won? You have been sadly thrown, and soiled, and bruised, but in the end the fight is yours and your Master's, and not the devil's. The old Lairds had all their struggles, but perhaps none, not even blinded old Eneas Dhu, so hard a one as this. You have determined to do what is right, come what might—to be true in your death. You are permitted to restore fourfold, for we are paying back out of

Aldour, father. We are mending the broken bond by links severed from our domestic affections, standing here among the dead—the dead freshly laid in the earth, and the dead of hundreds of years—with the heavens above us, and all worldly pride and ambition stilled and silenced in our hearts. Say the good fight is won, Aldour ; say you are agreed.'

' Yes, I am, Mary Aldour ; and I tell you that you've stood by me as good as a lad. You have not failed me, or shunned me, or let me run on, in mercy, into ruin, as many a lass would have done. You are their daughter as well as your mother's, Mary Aldour, and I will not fail you or them either. However cowardly I have been, I am not a coward to-day. Allan of Moidart's servant said of his body on Sherriff Muir, "That was a man yesterday," but mine may declare I will be a man the morn ; ay, though I should march to the market-cross of Inverluig and proclaim there, "Here is the man who misspent the Balinacluan trust and must ware his patrimony to make the loss good ; throw him in the jail for his baseness if you like, though you cannot send him to the Tower, where his peers lay in a royal cause ; he is a beggar, but he is no longer a traitor." Oh ! to think of the vile word, Mally, Mally. I'm thankful, too, that the secrecy and the guile are all by. And you will break it to your mother, girl, and Finralia will stand by me ; he does not need to be nice, though, for that matter, poor fellow, he is as blameless to his own hand as his neighbours. And

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so the strife is ended, and I will sleep again ; I have not slept a sound sleep for months, *Mary Aldour*.'

Thus other dews than the dews of evening—the dews of repentance, atonement, and reconciliation—descended on the wrung and parched heart of the foolish old Laird in the old kirkyard.





CHAPTER XVIII.

MARY AND USSIE MEET FINRALIA AFTER THE SCENE IN THE COURT-HOUSE.

AND so, Mary, your father has not only been prodigal, but vicious. He has spent what was not his own, as well as flung away what belonged to the family ; and you and Charlie and Malcolm and the girls and the little ones will all bear the brunt, and be branded on his account. He would take no warning ; he never breathed a word to me of his debts, or sought my counsel ; and you would have me to forget and forgive, and go and flatter him !' said Mrs. Macdonnel, in a still wrath that frightened Mary.

' Not flatter, mother—comfort.'

Mrs. Macdonnel winced at the word ; but she walked away to little Annie's bedside, and sat down stubbornly there, with her hands in her lap. But, at least, if there was a deep source of disunion in the family, if Aldour felt that his wife's face was set as iron against him, if he first quailed and moaned, and then revolted at the unqualified condemnation—at

least she kept out of his way—at least hers was a silent indignation, modest, not impudent, in its privacy, as a wife's should be. And Mary allowed it to work within her, dreading to attempt anything more, trusting that it would exhaust itself—believing that other feelings would rise up and wrestle with it, and cast it out when she saw Aldour suffering—Aldour, stripped of his ancestral honours, as he had promised to strip himself when the scathe and the scorn which he had provoked were doing their utmost, and he was enduring his penance—then Mary could not think but that her mother's heart would melt, and she would forget the injuries to her children in the bitterness of their father, the husband of her youth, the kindly, free-handed, inconsiderate Aldour of early days.

Mary was hurried herself—almost too hurried to pause and reflect—she was in terror of delay, in terror of any wavering or withdrawal on the part of her father. She believed nothing could save their reputation or independence but the proclamation of the loss of the cherished limb—the advertisement for sale of the property; and then Mary could see what they had at their disposal for their wants; then they might discharge all their obligations and begin anew—live on in a small way in the North, or emigrate to America, as so many families in the Country had done, and were doing. She had never anticipated such expatriation, but it might eventually be the best thing for them. Mary was in alarm lest there should be any

talk of a bad season for the sale, of men of business's scruples ; but as it happened, Aldour's man of business, when he confessed all to him, could advise no other clearance, since they would not go to law on Balinacluan's just claim, and Finralia allowed that he was of the same opinion, and the time was not very unpropitious for fair prices. To Mary's relief immediate steps were to be taken. Charlie was to be written for, to hear that he was the heir of nought but bonds and mortgages, which had better be met by the principal, before he was wrecked amongst them as his father had been. The Glen of Aldour was to be published to the world for the last time, coupled with the name of its old laird, unless indeed the family pertinaciously retained the title after the substance was gone—a custom which existed to a large extent in the Highlands, and arose naturally from the Government confiscations. There was to be a meeting of the sole remaining trustees on the Balinacluan estate privately convened by Finralia, at Aldour's prayer, in the Court-house, after the Sheriff's court was dismissed, and there Aldour was to deliver up his papers, plead guilty to the deficiency, crave time to make it up, and pledge himself to the measure he announced—the sale of his own estate of Aldour.

That was a cruel summer day to Mary ; the story was still not public—the glen had no word of its coming loss, it was sunny and prosperous as ever—the neighbours, the very servants were only dimly

conscious that something was wrong—that some misfortune or great change was impending over Aldour; but the day would declare it—the unexpected, unaccounted-for meeting in the Court-house would enlighten the world as to Aldour's folly and Aldour's punishment. Mary had no sympathy from her mother, Mary was inclined to compare her to a pillar of salt ; she could not tell the children ; she could not drop a word to influence the aroused curiosity of the servants ; she avoided alike Mrs. Macdonnel of the Schoolhouse, Mr. Cormac Macgregor, and the old Miss Macdonnels of the Cleugh, with all her power. Poor souls, they little dreamt of their coming deprivation. Her heart was breaking for her father, now haggard and half stupified, as he started on horseback with Finralia for his woful appointment.

Even her mother came out at that moment. 'You have forgotten your best bonnet, Aldour ;' and she took from him, with her own hand, his ordinary one, and handed him his velvet bonnet with the clan badge—the sprig of mountain heath. He took it silently, and rode off, with Finralia looking down thoughtfully on the scene in the porch, on Mrs. Macdonnel with her firm lips, on Mary with her erect head and white cheeks, on the wondering eyes of the servants standing about. They were new to such trials at Aldour, and he was old in the experience, for he felt as if he had all the sins and sorrows of his fathers on his back, and yet Aldour and he went together—a curious association. Aldour's hand, with

its one stain, fain to grip his own black as a Negro's, which he was vainly striving to whiten. And Mary Aldour had no refuge but at Finralia ; she could not rest at Aldour—she could not meet her mother's frozen eyes—she could not go elsewhere, she would stay with Miss Ussie until it was time to start on the look-out for her father.

Mary had been to Finralia since her first visit ; she had not gone to abuse Miss Ussie with a single tender of her acquaintance ; she had returned that they might profit by kindlier feelings, and Miss Ussie had never been hostile to her after the strange ceremony of their introduction ; Miss Ussie had been quite eager to encounter her later advances. There was meanness in the jealousy of poor Ussie Finralia, as there is meanness in all jealousies, but there was no meanness in her affections ; she was infuriated with Mary when she thought that she looked down upon Finralia—but when Miss Ussie discovered that instead the Aldours were relying upon Finralia, and employing him as an ally, then she had no notion of resenting their interference with her claims ; she had never been displeased with Finralia's entrance into Aldour, or piqued by his adherence to the family, her own worship of Rory was too pure for that. Could she have been vain enough to fancy any partiality on Mary Aldour's side for her brother, poor, enthusiastic, unbalanced Miss Ussie would have sworn everlasting allegiance and love to Mary on the spot ; she would have gone through fire and water for her ; she would

have teased and tried her at the same time, but she would not have listened to an ill word of her, or regarded her as other than a pattern of all excellence among woman-kind, against every provocation. As it was, Miss Ussie was very complacent to Mary, and gratified by her attention, and behaved to her—as Mistress Minnie said—‘like a lady,’ and was really entertaining in her odd intelligence and vehement imagination.

‘So, Mary Aldour, your father has got into trouble?’

Miss Ussie had some inkling of the business, but she did not intend to be rude or unamiable, she was only totally untutored, and unsophisticated, and very abrupt.

Mary bit her lips, but it was a lesson to her.

‘Yes, Miss Ussie; but he is to come out of it at his own cost. Aldour has been an example in the Country, and now he is to serve as a warning.’

‘You are favoured, you Macdonnels of Aldour, just to slip your foot into an indiscretion, and then draw back on biggest band; other folk have been more stiffnecked. Oh! Mary Aldour, it is a ghastly thing for the women of a family to sit at home and know of the sins of the men abroad, and never able to bridle them a bit, or turn their heads out of the broad way, but to look out on them coursing, and whirling, and dashing over the rocks into the whirlpools. Many a silly brain at Finralia has that sickened; many a dame and daughter of our house has broken her heart

and lost her wits within these walls. Mary Aldour, you that's counted a wise girl, have had little experience of sin and sorrow.'

'I think we've all had sufficient experience of that, madam, down in the depths of our own bosoms, and that knowledge should render us merciful; and, Miss Ussie, I do think, though it is a grand sight to see a man without reproach, it is also a spectacle that the angels may bear to witness, when a man has done wrong like Aldour, to hear him manfully and meekly acknowledge it, and engage to make amends.'

'But must he always own to wrongdoing? Is not that a hard saying?' asked Ussie, wistfully.

'Deed must he, Miss Ussie; not with diseased parade, but in word if required, in deed always.'

Miss Ussie pondered, and then she exclaimed suddenly, 'Mary Aldour, do you not find a great discrepancy between the Word and the world?'

'There is only an ell between them,' answered Mary, with a determined joke; 'I believe we may look for that distance also within the compass of our own bosoms, Miss Ussie,' but while Mary spoke she had a recollection of having reflected much on such a discord one Sunday, after the prayers at Choillean.

'Not to the same extent, madam,' declared Ussie, decidedly; 'not such a mountain of sordidness, and pride, and gross injustice, such light sentences to the like of John Dunglas and Flora Robertson, such heavy chastisements which we cannot abide or with-

stand to the children of a sinful house like me and Finralia.'

'But these are the ways of the world, and if they are thorny ways, the greater reward to the man that can tread them to his goal, Miss Ussie. We have been placed in our lots, and the greater heroes and heroines are we, if we dwarfs slay the giant circumstances, and not by might or by right, but by the Spirit of the Lord, compel the earth to carry us to the sky.'

'It is good to hear you, Mary Aldour,' granted Ussie; 'but you do not ken; no, you do not ken,' and Ussie shook her head.

'Which of all your birds and beasts do you like best, Miss Ussie?' inquired Mary; 'and will you allow me to bring my halfin brother Malcolm to see you? He thinks Miss Ussie of Finralia, who has tamed a hawk, and is allowed to keep a whole fawn to herself in her room, must be the greatest and happiest woman in the world.'

Ussie laughed a sad laugh, but the little woman was gratified by the reflected admiration. 'I'll be blithe to see Malcolm Aldour. Though I'm shy of ordinary company, I must not refuse a lad that covets my acquaintance. And, Mary Aldour, I like best this broken-winged starling which Rory brought in to me with the shot through its feathers, and the drops of warm blood trickling over his hands. She has never been able to do more than sit on the floor of her cage; but she pecks out of my hand. See, Mary Aldour. Nay, you have scared her with your stature

and your colour. She prefers cripple, wan Miss Ussie. She has a bad taste, but it is all her own. And the cur Ben that was caught in the rabbit traps, and had his leg nipped in the gin. Look to him, Mary Aldour ; he hears already that I speak of him, and he trails across the room to lie down on my gown, and lick my hand, and look up into my face. Did you ever watch how these dumb creatures look into your face ? Rory himself is not fonder, save when he has come from your gay house to our dull home, or has been out looking at the moon, and has stepped in with its light on his dark face, which says, " What's all the world, cummer ? What's all its steer ? "

' There, Miss Ussie,' Mary protested, ' you invoke heroes and heroines on the very same terms as those on which I appointed them. You prefer your pets for the things that they suffer, though I vow that savours of asceticism.'

' I know nothing about asceticism, madam. I think I've naturally a sensuous nature ; it was the curse of the Finralias, for they brutalized themselves with it. I like my birds and beasts because they bear a resemblance to myself, and I sort those that vex them. When I put another starling in beside my Unah to keep company with the bit forlorn thing, and he pecked her and scorned her, though I had taken pains to rear him in the same nest, I wrung his neck with my own hand ; and when a puppy of Fingal's litter chased and snapped at my stiff Ben, and shamed the disabled beast, I made Rory load his gun, and

call him into the courtyard, and shoot him through the head.'

'These were summary judgments, Miss Ussie ; the animals but followed their instincts.'

Ussie was gloomily silent, and in the stillness Mary heard Finralia's horse's hoofs, and was apprised that all was over, and Aldour nigh home again. But Mary was torn by two impulses. She must greet and caress her father, but she could only solace him now, while she could cross-examine Finralia. Even Aldour might be too deeply wounded not to strive to conceal his wound ; but, she said to herself, without examining the implication which her words bore, that Finralia would tell her all which she wished to know ; she could make Finralia speak ; she was sure of Finralia.

Finralia came in with alacrity, as if he had foreseen her presence, and leant upon the chair opposite her, that she might fill his sight.

'Is it all over ?' Mary inquired with a gasp, after the first salutation. 'Have you settled it ? Have they accepted the satisfaction ?'

'Yes, and no thanks to them : they could not do otherwise.'

'They were not considerate, then, or feeling : they did not remember how Aldour had stood amongst them. Excuse me, I must go to him.'

'You need not go. I rode with Aldour till Mrs. Macdonnel joined him : she came up the road by the Spout Bahn. Aldour wished to take her up behind him, though he had no pillion, but she would not con-

sent. She walked by his bridle ; and as he left off his trot to pace his horse beside her, they will not be at Aldour for an hour to come.'

'And it will take me an hour to go through the glens,' Mary said reflectingly ; but she lingered while she considered angrily, 'My mother might well go so far to afford my father the bare check of her company. How could she hope that he would take the road home unless this stranger reprobate, Finralia, brought him under the porch ? How could she credit that he would not suffer his horse to stumble and throw him, and break his neck ? He had only to take the dangerous turn down the Spout Bahn road, up which her conscience caused her to climb, that John Dunglas once rode with care behind him, and loosen his rein, and it would have been easily done.' But she observed aloud, 'Are you sure it is ended, Finralia ? Did my father speak out ? Do they understand that we are to sell Aldour to put young Balinacluan into his full rights ?'

'It is ended, and they are dolts if they do not comprehend it,' declared Finralia, passing his hand over his face. 'Shall I tell it you, Mary Aldour ? How I stood up, as Aldour begged me, or, by your leave, I would not have presumed, and introduced the subject and the man. I introduced Aldour (Mary, don't be angry) to the Country, and said, here was one whom they all loved and honoured come to scatter some doubts which had been cast on his conduct, and to finish for ever a misconception into which he had

been led ; but Aldour himself interrupted me, “Don’t mouth the matter, Finralia ; I want no lawyer’s going about the bush, no advocate’s fine phrases,” he protested vehemently. “Here, gentlemen, I am come to tell you that this trust has been too much for me. I thought I could depend upon myself and my principles, but as my embarrassments increased, and the temptation became too strong, I yielded. I borrowed my friend’s money which I was holding for his children ; borrowed it without warrant or authority, and employed it on my own behoof. Yes, sirs ; you may call the act a lie and a theft—it partook of such villainy—but, oh, Corryarrick ! man, I never doubted that I would replace the money. Pitfadden, can you believe I would have laid such a sin and shame to my charge as that of defrauding other than the Inverluig bank of a wheen pounds’ interest which I could have made good any day ? And, gentlemen, I have put Aldour in the market ; Fergus Macdonnel, my man, you will read the deed of sale ; Finralia, you will bear me witness that I will pay back every plack, principal and interest. More than that, I would willingly agree to any forfeit or fine that you would think fit to impose upon me ;” and with that he sat down.’

‘And what did they reply?’ asked Mary, shading her face.

‘They replied like the poor pack they are,’ burst out Finralia, turning his back and walking up and down. ‘You may believe it, Mary Aldour ; they trampled

upon the poor gentleman on whom they had so often fawned. Corryarrick, with his thick bull's neck, cried, "Tut, tut, Aldour, you know there is no such thing as blood money now;" and Pitfadden, with his high narrow head, his miserable patrician face, asked how long Aldour had been aware that Simon Balinacluan lived.'

'Unjust, ungenerous!' groaned Mary, standing up.

'Like the starling and the puppy,' muttered Ussie.

Mary heard her, and the comparison did her good. She gulped down her grief and pain. 'They spoke but after their impulses; they are haughty and narrow-minded, or coarse-tempered and vindictive men. Aldour was so much nobler, so much truer and kinder, that they cannot brook the recollection; but Corryarrick is one of ourselves. Well, well! "Go not into a brother's house in the day of your adversity," said the wise man. We have lived to understand his wisdom.'

'Aldour rose up again, all trembling with passion; how could it be otherwise? "Gentlemen, it is true that I have been a wrong-doer; but if you can credit that I wittingly defrauded banished men and orphan children, then strike me down where I stand."

'Then, sure enough, there was a murmur of "Shame! shame! Hold your tongue, Pitfadden. There is no doubt whatever. Young Balinacluan's whereabouts and his very existence were lost. Aldour has been reckless and much to blame; but he was as incapable as any man here of such baseness."

"You must ask that question of me, gentlemen,"

I said. "Some time ago I became accidentally sensible of Aldour's misappropriation," I said it plainly this time, Mary Aldour; "and if you accuse him of deliberate fraud, of course you render me art and part in the crime." "Why did you not come forward with your knowledge?" demanded Pitfadden. "Why, I for one, gentlemen, did not care to rend a friend's garment; that was one reason. Another and a more powerful one was, that I was perfectly convinced that Aldour would put back the money. Probably you have already freely slandered both of us. But, gentlemen, though you are not without some warrant in my case—I mean the Country has given me and mine a bad name, and hanged us without hesitation for a long time now—still you will not get off so simply with me as with Aldour. You shall not strike me, and I shall not strike you, though my hand is as strong as yours, and I have sword, dirk, and pistols out at Finralia; but I will summon you into a public court, and cause you—yes, you, my patron, as you consider yourself, Pitfadden—to eat your words, and to confess to the world that you have defamed a couple of gentlemen, your neighbours and equals, and one of them your friend, and your acknowledged head in the Country, because of a transgression frankly owned, and amply atoned for."

"That was bravely said," cried Ussie, clapping her hands; "and I trust you have broken with Pitfadden. I have long wished it. You must rise, Rory, but not by serving that man."

But Mary walked up to him, and took his hand ; and Mary had no more notion than Charlotte, when she approached Werter, how she thrilled every nerve in that man by so slight an action. Mary had heard of Finralia's devotion from her father ; she had been forced to see it with her own eyes ; unconsciously she had now a vivid perception of her power, but she forgot it at this moment, when her heart was only full of pity, and sorrow, and gratitude. 'We will never forget it, Finralia,—never, that you stood by us in our humiliation—and not the less that you did not spare yourself—henceforth Aldour and Finralia are friends.'





CHAPTER XIX.

'THE ROUTE IS COME.'

IT was all true, then—all confirmed—
Aldour was to be sold—the Macdonnels
were to depart from the glen—for the
moment they did not greatly care
whither. It had been easy to speak of
it, but the tug of war, in homely Scotch phrase ‘the
proof of the pudding,’ was yet to come in the fact
fulfilled. And the news thus far was on every wind.
Aldour had been extravagant and unscrupulous, and
he must defray his weakness and his sin with his family
rights. The glen had heard it, and there was a wail
throughout its length and breadth. The ties of chief-
tainship were still strong, and the Aldour race had
not lessened them. To want Aldour was to want the
kindly, protecting, though imperious father, the cordial,
generous, though autocratic elder brother. Peasant
and tacksman alike cried out, ‘Had not every house
in the glen been free to Aldour? Would they not
have opened their very purses at his call? Had they
not done as much for the exiled Lairds?—convened

to pay the rents twice over—raised stock in thousands, not by lifting, but by honest, loving contribution, and driven it to the estate bought back for a Lochiel or a Glengarry? Now, was Aldour to consent to sell his and their land, and to transfer their allegiance? Incredible—impossible.

In some the compulsory belief took the form of paroxysms of grief, and old men and women came sobbing to the Great House, and little children were sent to clutch Aldour's plaid as he walked abroad. In others, rage, fanned into frenzy, mingled with and absorbed the regret. They were shamed by their chief's desertion. Better he had died than forsaken them. Their old memories were despised, their old services forgotten. Wild men of the clan came striding down from the lone tributary glens, where their imaginations had been nursed by brooding on their warlike traditions in utter solitude, and cursed Aldour to his face as a degenerate Macdonnel, a renegade chief, whom evil would track and good never meet.

Mary suffered as much as many a quiescent maiden for her lover, or mother for her first-born. There was the people—her people. Mackie, who was always submissive, and always with her cheeks wet with tears, contradicting the smile she got up to humour Mary's jokes—for Mary joked horribly dry jokes—and who would receive them all into the sanctuary of the Schoolhouse, not quite so substantial as the change-house at the Ford of Auchnaglas,

with its couthiness, with its coarse fare, its couple of cows—original gifts from Aldour—Aldour would bestow no more ‘compliments’ on the poor of the clan—its half score of goats, its Friesland cocks and hens, its peat stack, and its grey rocks on which Mary had sat in dignity and examined the samplers—few more samplers would be sewed at the School-house. There was Mr. Cormac Macgregor, who had no couthiness about his cabin, could not maintain it—could not distinguish it—was indifferent, as became a philosopher—only liked to be petted like a Frenchman or a child, who sometimes swore that the wide world would do honour to the fair in the person of Mary Aldour, and that he would only be too happy to attend her as a squire or a knight-errant, and at others insinuated that this choice specimen of the fair was guilty of very unbecoming and ungrateful independence in not contriving somehow to confine herself for life to the glen of Aldour, for the express purpose of serving an absurd, crabbed old gentleman. There were the Miss Macdonnels of the Cleugh, who never would comprehend the disaster—how could it be thought of, when they never could plait up their turbans or finish their shawls without Mary Aldour? After a hundred mortifying explanations from Mary, they remained still convinced that it was a matter of disputed pedigree—a most unaccountable affair, when Aldour’s was the best-preserved genealogy in the Country, and they were bound to say they had it at their finger ends. There was Mary’s

Moome, who kissed her and blessed her solemnly now every time they met and parted, in anticipation of the doleful days when there should be no more meetings and partings; and who could do nothing but spin and weave magnificent sets of garters for Aldour and the boys, as if, indeed, they were to set out on their feet to push their fortunes, and to be exposed to a great expenditure of this chief adornment of a Highlander’s knee.

After all these, there was the place; and what this place alone was to her, Mary’s rapid falling away, her loss of flesh and colour, the strong girl’s premature drooping and pining proved. Had it not been for Aldour and her mother and the family, Mary believed she must have died of leaving the glen, and it is possible she might have done so; in some natures—and those frequently the most bold, free, and joyous—local attachments are so intense, that the tearing them up produces a touching, yearning home-sickness which may be unto death. It ended in clear-headed Mary lapsing into the addled condition of the bewildered Miss Macdonnels; she grew secretly incredulous of the exile; she walked about in a dream, foreboding it, and preparing for it, but not realizing it.

To dwell in Aldour no more; to see it no more in all its changes—white with winter, green in its summer greenness, purple-clad in autumn. To miss Ben Falloch and Craig Dhu from the landscape; to fail in perceiving the sun rise behind the one and sink behind the other—in those glorious daffodil and

crimson sunsets of the North ; no longer to note the signs of the weather by the familiar landmarks ; no longer to set her spiritual chronometer by her own special private landmarks. The path by the loch, where she strolled, reading this chapter and that essay (essays were more in favour than sermons in Mary's youth, and in truth there was very little between them), and making those sedate, pious resolutions ; the turn in the road where she took her last look at Aldour on her first journey to school at Inverluig (from what eminence would she take her Pisgah view at this stage in her history ?) ; the ash-tree on the moor, where she had sat with Anne Macdonald, and by which John Dunglas and Anne had spoken their final farewell ; the sandy, broomy track which she had followed to intercept Finralia at the Ford of Auchnaglas, and learn their fate. No more to sail on the loch, no more to listen to the dash of the Spout Bahn ; all her projects for future years overturned or relinquished to others ; turnips to be universally grown and approved in the little fields, and Aldour to have no share in the triumph ; the new thatch so long talked of for the Great House and its offices to be laid on, and they neither to be inconvenienced nor benefited by the repairs ; like the Miss Macdonnels, Mary was tempted to decide it was a great mistake—it would never be accomplished.

Outwardly, however, Mary, like every other person, apprehended the change, and acted upon it. Charlie and the girls were brought home. Anne Macdonald

was written to and apprised of their altered prospects. Charlie and the girls—here was no lightening of the trial in the meantime, but rather an aggravation of it. Their home-coming had been looked forward to with feelings so different. Mary had intended it to be so far removed from this. In Mary Macdonnel's forethought and generosity, seeing that her mother was engrossed with the younger children, Mary herself had taken quite a motherly interest in her bigger brothers and sisters ; she had written many a letter to them which might be thought dogmatic and high-flown now-a-days, but which was full, nevertheless, of a pretty minor strain of close affectionate interest. No modern young lady's scroll to sisters contains such comic intimations that she expects to find them 'at the top of the mode,' such pertinacious questions after common-place books, such anxious inquiries and injunctions about companions, such cutting condemnations of fops and fortune-hunters, such attention to the stoop in the back and the weak throat, such punctual messages about pets, such fond recollections and faithful promises of little dishes to be prepared, old books to be preserved, even old places guarded and chairs set in honour of family whims and crotchets. And now to have Flora and Catherine well-grown, comely girls, of good carriage, abilities, and dispositions, but not very far forward in any way, appear with their future checked and their present blighted—for on none does poverty fall more crushingly and corrodingly than on inexperienced,

ardent girls—was another misery to Mary. She could not bear to see the girls return scared and troubled, continually whispering to each other about the family misfortunes, sedulous to subdue their tone to their circumstances ; grown shy, too, for, to a certain extent, they were excluded from the family consultations. Aldour and their mother were naturally disposed to overlook what was to the girls the great event of their ‘finishing’ completed, and their regular establishment as grown-up members of the family, and to treat them still as mere school-girls. Even Mary could not talk to them of their loss and their approaching removal from Aldour. It was sore to Mary, especially when she felt that in the midst of her affection for her sisters, she was impatient with them, repulsed their attempts at confidences, was sharp with them when she fancied them merely lack-a-daisical over what was torture to her.

Then it was little better with Charlie. Charlie was very like what his father was or had been, both in mind and person—a candid, pleasant, large-limbed, open-faced, manly lad ; at first he had been considerably stunned by the announcement that his inheritance was gone from him, for Charlie had been brought up in the faith of the glen ; but although very sorry to leave his people, Charlie could not be long very sorry on his own account. He was young, sanguine, and full of hardy life, and now he would see the world ; he must get a commission, and knock about the globe, and perhaps make a fortune, and buy back his patri-

mony, as had been done by more than one ejected native of the Country : so, really, although Charlie was ready to sympathize with his friends, vexed in his own way that Aldour had come short of his standard of worth, he could not break his heart for his own share in the calamity. Charlie was not so far removed from Malcolm, who, after the first twenty-four hours, hunted, shot, and fished again in Aldour as keenly, and with as little compunction, as if he were to be a boy in the glen for ever. Being reconciled for himself, Charlie was a little apt to forget the unassuaged anguish of others. He would whistle and laugh, and he would seek his sport at inappropriate times. He would be thoughtless and a little selfish ; and Mary, in spite of her own jokes, got galled and irritated, and would challenge Charlie, and reproach him, until the young man blazed up also, and cried that Mary had grown quite a Turk—that there was no living with her now ; and one day he bitterly offended her by adding the insinuation—for the eyes of twenty have their own penetration—that he believed she might undertake Finralia, for she was fit to cope with any Finralia who ever breathed.

Not even Anne answered Mary's expectation. Anne wrote a hurried note in answer to Mary's afflicted announcement of the great reverse in the glen, expressing her concern, but pleading agitation, press of business, the speedy setting off of the post for brevity ! Brevity on such an occasion, and with such lame excuses, bore only one interpretation. Anne

had taught herself to look with such disgust on the North that she had become cold and averse even to Aldour ; and she could not feign what she did not feel, when ‘more than kin and less than kind.’ In these days of scepticism of friendship, of cool general acquaintance, and disparagement of one’s kind, it would be idle to tell a careless, conceited girl how Mary Aldour was wounded fresh and depressed by this new stroke of destiny. Anne Macdonald shown heartless ! On whom, then, of her early, warmly-estimated schoolfellows could Mary depend ? Mary’s trust in human nature had received a multiplied shock ; no wonder she sank under it, was weak and nervous, and dared not extend her test.

But most of all her father weighed on Mary Aldour’s mind. Had she only rescued him from one destruction to cast him into another ? Had she only drawn him from Scylla to plunge him into Charybdis ? Mary had reason to fear it.

The drinking habits in Scotland were then carried to outrageous excess, and were perilous as perilous could be. It is but justice to say, however, that they were faced under a panoply of defence, which is all rent and shattered to-day. Strong men, of active habits and early hours, practised them while they possessed their faculties with marvellous exemption from intoxication in the first place, and notorious impunity from the bodily consequences in the second. They were not exposed to public condemnation ; on the contrary, the practice and sentiment of even the

serious portion of the community went far to support them and urge them on their tremendous venture. Drinking and swearing were actually apologized for as 'setting off' a buck's conduct and conversation. In some things it was a brutal era, but so it was, that thousands on thousands contracted the abomination in comparative ignorance of the result, and without abating a jot of their upright or stern principles—glaring and sad as the contradiction might be—without endangering a hair's breadth of their self-respect—without missing a particle of their neighbours' esteem. Don't you see the poor topers of this generation are immeasurably apart in all save essential sin from the topers of that generation which began with the first Georges and ended with the Regency? If this had not been the case, think you good old Johnson would have proposed so genially to have one taste of the drink which made all Scotchmen so happy? Think you he would have used the term, had it been recognised as commonly a gross satire in his time? Think you he would still have had the heart to try the experiment? What! in the face of the brutalized lads and ruined men—the disgraced families and broken hearts? What! in the teeth of the criminal statistics—even if you suppose him obstinately eschewing prevention bills.

In Aldour's lifetime, it was after a man was old and infirm like Dunglas, or humbled and harrowed like Aldour, that the mad potations told with fearful

certainty. ‘A fine man, but since his decline too much of a sot;’ ‘poor fellow, he’s had his ups and downs, and now he’s a complete slave to the bottle,’ were qualifications often enough dropped in carelessly among expressions of high commendation and undiminished regard.

Aldour sat soaking himself, stupid and savage, in the old oak parlour, and Mary, who had wielded so much power over him on other occasions, sat darkly despairing, unable to arrest the huge rummer with its gilded border and its fiery contents. Finralia looked on helplessly, and was very wildly jeered by Aldour for his unsocial sobriety. Charlie was snubbed and put down for merely daring to show himself uncomfortable and for declining to bear his father company. What could save Aldour from the chasm suddenly burst into a yawning gulf at his feet? What could save Aldour from destruction and death? What could restore to him the love and respect of his lady? What?—except the imminence and the direness of the danger. Mrs. Macdonnel, to the surprise of all, stepped down from her children and sat opposite Aldour at the table. Annie might fret above, Niel exhaust himself below—she neither heard nor heeded them. Aldour glanced wistfully in her face; the blue eyes so like Mary’s returned his gaze: ‘Let me pour out your liquor, Aldour.’

‘Madam, you need not grudge me the poor means of oblivion.’

‘Did I ever stint you in your ploys, Aldour?’

‘And oh ! lass, did I ever cross you till I failed in your eyes?’

‘Will you cross me now, Aldour?’

‘I judge, madam, it matters not.’

‘It does matter—it will cure or it will kill. I have been hard, Aldour ; I will not deny it. Forgive me, and take me back to your side.’

Aldour stretched past her for the drink, but she took hold of his arm. ‘Aldour, do you mind when you said I would command you always? Now I plead in vain.’

‘And what then, mistress?’

‘I will sit and plead here to the end ; I will never leave you more.’

‘Then you may have your way,’ granted Aldour, with a short sigh, half of shy pleasure, half of discontent. ‘I cannot hold out contradicting you ; and I would rather have your company, woman, strange as it is now, though it smite me, than any glass that can cheer my woe, or deaden my hurt.’

‘Say you so, my man ? Then you shall never want it again. I take blame to myself that aught ever deprived you of it. Go, Mary, and tend the bairns ; I must sit or and walk out with Aldour. We must take order, girl, of our flitting and our new home ; we have much to talk over.’

And Mrs. Macdonnel wandered once more with Aldour by the loch-side and on the hills as she had done in their honeymoon, or she filled his glass as she

span a fresh set of ruffles for him instead of the knitting and the white seam with which she had been so long occupied for the children ; and the fever cooled down in Aldour's heart and brain.

Then Annie in Mary's arms first learned to control her fits of uneasiness and suffering, 'because, Annie,' Mary had insisted, 'I will go where ye will, and do what you will, but you must not cry for your mother ;' and the mournful emphasis impressed itself on the sensitive spirit of the child ; and Niel began to confide to Mary, 'I will, maybe, grow better now, and live to be a man and a scholar, and make a noise in the great world, like Mr. Cormac Macgregor, since my mother can trust me all to myself and you, Mary.'

Mary had one blessing, and a mighty blessing, to be thankful for.

'Your father and mother have been a happy couple, Mary,' observed Mrs. Macdonnel of the Schoolhouse, before Mary and Finralia.

'Yes,' Mary answered, pleasantly ; 'the elders match well.'

'Yet, though they were a fine man and woman, both of them, they were reckoned very unlike, and they are unlike to this day ; but, see now how they come out well in union. To my mind, Aldour is never so wise in his frankness, or Mrs. Macdonnel so good-natured in her prudence, as when they are together. Apart, they have their faults, but combined, they form a fine couple—a very fine couple.'

‘Like you and Mr. Macdonnel, Mackie; your liveliness tempers his learning.’

‘Well, I’ll not say, my dear, but Macdonnel is all the better of being driven from his book by a silly tongue wag-wagging, better than if he had another bookworm s^ed at his elbow. But preserve me, Mary Aldour, have I said anything that Finralia could take to himself, that he has flushed purple, and risen, and gone off and left us?’

‘How could you, Mackie?’

‘Maybe,’ suggested Mackie, cautiously and curiously, ‘he fancies that gentility, beauty, parts, and virtue, would all find their reverse at Finralia.’

‘I do not know how that could be,’ answered Mary, coolly. ‘Finralia is comely enough, though he is a dark man; he is as comely a man as I see, and he is twice as clever as his brother lairds; and for vice, I hear no more of vice in connexion with this Finralia.’

‘Have you heard that Pitfadden has dismissed him from his place?’

‘I have heard that Roderick Finralia resigned it.’

‘Well, if you defend him, Mary Aldour——’

‘Now, don’t run off with a notion, Mackie,’ interrupted Mary, hastily. ‘Finralia is negatively good, and he has acted nobly towards my father; but you have only to walk through the glen of Finralia, always leaving out Miss Ussie, to perceive how callous or contradictory the man must be. Why, Mackie, I would not give three straws for all the comfort in Finralia.’

"Deed, you're right, Mary ; and though Finralia is a strapping fellow, and they say they've money enough —ill-gotten gear it is, to be sure—they are not like us.'

It had been seriously proposed that the Aldours should emigrate, and Mary for one, in the sickness of her heart, was inclined to it; they would be out of sight of what they had lost, while they retained it unfailingly in their hearts, and they would be all together. But the process of emigration was not a rapid one ; the plan would take time to consider—months to mature the preliminaries—months and months at sea before they touched the virgin soil of the New World. In the meantime they must rent a house, and dwell a space longer in the old country. Aldour, placable always, was fast getting reconciled to his position, well nigh as distant as the poles from what it would have been in the Low Country or England ; he was soothed by the commiseration which, after taking an interval to accumulate, was now flowing forth to him on all sides with fresh esteem and fondness. They had cancelled his delinquency, they only remembered that he was good old Aldour, heavily punished for his folly, and sure he had not spent his means on his own gratification, or hoarded them in selfishness. His neighbours were neighbourly now as could be—his clan attached as ever. Aldour's primitive nature was satisfied with the show for the power ; and after all, which is the reality—the consideration of our fellows, the indulgences which we crave, or the

rank and riches which occasion them, and which the moth and rust soonest corrupt, the thieves earliest break through and steal ? for we hold a sceptre by sufferance many a day after we have no more of our kingdom than the fortress of Gaeta. Aldour commenced to shrink from the other wrench. After all, where could he be better than near his people, who knew what he had been, who held him still, and would hold him always as Macdonnel of Aldour, who would see him at last laid in the Aldour kirkyard, with the rest of his race, with all the honours ?

Mrs. Macdonnel's tastes were of a stationary description. Her temper rather inclined her to accept the trouble where it found her, endure it heroically, and rise above it, than fly from it, and run into new difficulties and toils. Besides, she feared the strange climate of America for her younger children.

Mary did not combat the point, now that the truth was proclaimed, and the worst known of them, and borne by them ; now that her mother was restored to her father, and leading him, she thought it did not signify much. For herself, all places were alike to her in her youthful agony, in this season of suffering. If they had gone to a town, indeed, her utter restlessness might have preyed upon her ; and here she could still have something to do for the clan—for Mackie, for Mr. Cormac Macgregor, for the old ladies of the Cleugh, for Moome, and the rest—it would break the blow to them, ‘ poor bodies.’

The Aldours were not to remain at Aldour until

the sale, to be pensioners on their successor's bounty ; they could avoid that mortification, at least. Mary and Mrs. Macdonnel soon fixed on a house which a substantial tacksman of John Dunglas's father's had vacated on acquiring the lease of another farm. It would have been a very odd habitation for a family of the Macdonnel's birth and breeding to descend to out of the Highlands ; but there it was nothing uncommon—it was very little poorer than that in which Dr. Johnson visited the old North-country Baronet and his granddaughters. Like it, this was neither more nor less than three stone cottages, better partitioned than ordinary, and with laid floors, built in the form of a square, and running out into sheds for the cows or the poultry, the farm or the garden implements. It needed some attention to cleanliness to render it tolerable outside, and the general advantage of a fine situation to lend it any attraction. In this respect the Tannach did not yield to the house of Aldour. It stood in the angle of an elevated table-land of moor, looking down into Pitfadden on the one side, and Dunglas on the other ; commanding lochs and rivers, and the two great houses of the glens ; but these were the glens of the strangers, and though Ben Falloch raised its rugged, misty mass in the distance, it was Ben Falloch under a strange aspect too, no longer owning their sway—waxed foreign, like everything else. The Tannach's own sheltering pine-wood behind, and its own burn and broken little corrie,

would be long before it filled the void in these poor people’s empty, aching hearts.

Neither did Mary and Mrs. Macdonnel find the matter of disposing of their great colony of household dependents so terrible as it has been represented by other old families fallen from their high estate. The explanation was, they were all Macdonnels of Aldour, and of course when the head went forth into the world, the members must follow. This was their first going out into the world, you understand, and although some were yearning over their old home and stronghold, some were only timid, and some excited like other children. Mary had but to recommend, counsel, and encourage them, and remind them that they were all to come back to the Tannach when they were sick, or out of place, or going to be married ; the family would find room for them, though they filled the hay-loft, and she slept upon the floor. The mistresses of the family had nothing invidious to avoid in selecting those who were to remain and share their diminished fortunes. The choice settled itself ; there was Sheelas, who had come with Mrs. Macdonnel, and had always been cook and housekeeper, and there were Sheelas’s niece and nephew, who had been brought tender orphans to the house, and could not be separated from their authoritative, responsible aunt ; they could fee no more ; but there were also old Farquhar and his sister, who had never dreamt of wages, but had received bite and sup, coat and gown, and occasional

gifts of pocket-money from Aldour and his father, since the memory of living man, and who must be kept, because no other person would maintain them, unless out of charity, and the family would almost accept charity themselves before their retainers were indelibly branded by an application to 'the poor-box.'

Only a small portion of the multifarious furniture of the House could be contained in the Tannach. The heir-looms, the relics of family tradition, the personal possessions, were withdrawn, the remainder went with the house and land to stop Balinacluan's maw. The surrounding families were friendly in the extremity with the warm friendliness of Celts. Masters and men, horses and carts, came in as subsidiary aid, until Aldour might have flitted half the Country instead of his own household. Captain Robertson walked across from Croclune and nailed up every bit of shelving in the Tannach, when the wright was powerless with lumbago, and the Captain was much more useful than Mr. Cormac, now striding, now skipping, now sulking, now smiling among the pilgrims.

There was the climax — the bustle to hide the heart-break—the last sleep under the ancient roof—the last walk down the glen, their own patriarchal glen. Ah ! how little Mary thought when she was taking farewell of all the cherished spots with Anne Macdonald, that her own turn would come next, and that so speedily. As for the oak parlour and the glimpse through the glass door into the homely

but venerable hall, and the woodbine porch, and the background of the loch and its buckler of mountains, Mary thought it would be a vision which would not cease to haunt her eyes till they closed in death.

Fain would Alister, the piper, have assembled a gathering of the Macdonnels, and, amidst passionate sobs and groans, played the Clan’s Lament, and marched them out of the glen. Aldour peremptorily forbade it. This was no honoured departure, as of old, to the wars or to the long home of their fathers. This was their vanishing from the scene in irremediable degradation ; relinquishing what was no longer their own, what he had flung to the dogs of fanatical hospitality and liberality. Aldour was somewhat thick-headed, but nothing showed more clearly how abased he considered himself than his positively declining the last public attendance of the piper. Alister was reduced to console himself by stealthily adhering to one after another of the bands of departing servants, and emitting a subdued blare to the chorus of their doleful ‘Tuishlichi an t’Each ceithir-chasach’ (The four-footed horse doth often stumble, so may the strong and mighty fall) ; and their resigned ‘Thig Diu re h’airc ’s eh’n airc nar thig’ (God cometh in the time of distress, and it is no longer distress when he comes).

Aldour and Mrs. Macdonnel went away on foot, arm in arm and alone. The children were stowed into the canvas car, presided over by Mrs. Macdonnel of the Schoolhouse, and driven by Charlie. The

servants had dispersed irregularly but entirely, when Mary stole back and came out all by herself according to her earnest wish. She must walk fast to be at the Tannach before she was missed and looked for with a little anxiety and trepidation, so she passed Finralia under the evening star, curtseying, if a ghost can curtsey, he understanding very well that he must not approach her while she pursued in perfect solitude this stage in her journey of life.

Aldour was to be sold by public roup in Inverluig, and although only the price—a mere trifle, some ten or fifteen thousand pounds, about which there was all this outcry, but then it was no trifile to the interested parties—could concern the family, they harassed themselves by gathering rumours and counter-rumours of intended purchasers. Especially poor Aldour had speculated and lectured on the destination of the land, like a man carried all that hot, thundery July day at the Tannach. Then Mary, looking out of the little window, like Sister Anne, spied a man in a post-boy's jacket and cap riding into the yard. Did Fergus Macdonnel promise to send word? Had Finralia despatched a messenger? They ran out in a group, breathless, as if to receive the announcement that by a miracle they were restored to Aldour. Some benevolent prince, some fairy godmother, had brought it back to them.

But this letter-carrier had not come from Inverluig at all—they had neglected to notice that he had arrived by the South road; he had travelled a vast

deal farther ; he had been on the way for two days and the part of two nights ; he had ridden all the distance from Edinburgh, when men posted and did not telegraph, with a slip of a note from Anne Macdonald, not to Mary, but to Aldour. The company stared at each other in blank amazement ere he tore it open.

‘DEAREST UNCLE,

‘I hope this will reach you on the very day, in time to be the first to inform you that I have induced my guardians here to buy back Aldour. We have only just heard of a certainty that our bid will be taken, for nobody in the Country will oppose us. I am coming to-morrow, so ask Mary to make room for me. I am so glad, Aldour, that I have danced a real jig, though you said that I never could execute one. But I cannot pay my respects properly to you and to my dear aunt, you must wait till I come ; and so must the little ones for their loves. While I am always,

‘Your own dutiful and obliged niece,

‘ANNE MACDONALD.’

‘Thank God,’ cried Aldour, brokenly, ‘it has not gone out of the Macdonnels ! I have not sent it among aliens.’

‘It is all within her deserts, and Anne will be a true and kind mistress,’ declared Mrs. Macdonnel.

In their pure disinterestedness they had the alleviation, as it was offered tenderly, without pique or grudge.

'Heyday ! Edinburgh Anne Macdonald mistress of the Glen of Aldour !' burst in Charlie, in sheer wonderment.

'But won't it be all the same when Cousin Anne has it ?' put in Malcolm, puzzled with this new definition of *meum* and *tuum*.

'No, no, lad, it can never be the same,' said Aldour, more slowly ; but he added gently, 'it is next best for the people, and we are bound to think first of them.'

'I know I will go up to the House with Anne,' asserted Niel, stoutly. 'I have no peace to study here.'

'And I,' cried Annie ; 'I like the big rooms, and the old servants, and the company coming and going, though I used to think they plagued me. It is dull here, and I cannot breathe, and my head is sore. I am Anne's namesake and pet ; Anne will take me home the very morn.'

'Whisht ! whisht ! you foolish bairns. Mary must read you Mr. Brooke's story of the little fishes, to make you more contented.'

'And will you leave your mother behind, Annie ?'

'My mother will come with me, though she does not take such care of me as she was wont to do. Oh ! I know Mary has told me she has a great deal to think of now, and she is very kind, dear mother ; and so are you, Aldour ; and I think we will all go up to the Great House—our own House again ; Catherine and Flora, and all ; and Anne will have dances for

the girls like what daved me when I could not sleep at night ; but I sleep better now : and Alister, the piper, will not need to walk so far to play the pipes.'

'We don't want dances,' interrupted Flora and Catherine hastily, but pricking their colt's ears nevertheless ; 'we are very well pleased to read, and work, and improve ourselves at home ; and Alister does not mind the walk, Annie ; everybody does not hate walking as you do.'

Mary feared she had very much reason to read Mr. Brooke's story of the little fishes on her own behalf. When they were all so delighted—when there was general jubilee in the Tannach—it was such a shame for her to feel any bitterness in the midst of their joy ; not that Mary was not glad and grateful : glad for her family, grateful for her people, and, above all, glad and grateful for Anne herself ; that Anne was cleared ; that dear Anne—good, pure, sensible, meek Anne—was restored to her old high station in her regard. But still that Anne should return as mistress to Aldour, where they had entertained her,—that she should be the patroness and they the recipients of her kindness ; that pale, quiet, South Country Anne, whom they had laughed at and teased in spite of her purse, while they loved her, should be Lady of Aldour, their lady in the seat of the old head of the Macdonnels. Mary had never felt what wealth could do ; henceforth she would be disposed to bow down to it with the herd. It was gall to Mary Aldour, all the more unpalatable that she hated herself for tasting its poison.

It was evident that Anne expected to see them at the Great House still ; and as the Country was ringing with this unexpected event, and the clan overflowing with comfort and joy—for was it not the next best thing to Aldour himself—nay, was it not Aldour himself—the people were as slow as Malcolm at their *meum* and *tuum*—Aldour was still chief, and, with his kinswoman supplying the funds, why should he not still be Laird ? And Mary went back for the first time to Aldour with her father to receive Anne as its owner.

Aldour behaved as well as he had done since he had thrown off his evil mantle of deceit ; he was like himself—his best self—in the simplicity that at once accepted his office as kinsman and guardian to the heiress of Aldour, and saw nothing in it intolerable to his pride, in the calmness that resulted from his mingled manliness and modesty.

Mary tried to be cheerful and gracious, and show no sign of the flavour in her mouth, but she had the mortification of betraying it to the very first person she met, and of receiving the most cutting rebuke she could fancy, and that from no other than Finralia. ‘Are you going up, too, to pay your court to my cousin Anne ? Of course, you have heard that she has bought Aldour, and that we are all transformed into her subjects ; and I am sure we could not have a dearer, better little sovereign. But if you are very quick, you will be among the first on the ground, and even noble monarchs have a weakness for their first supporters.’

Finralia opened wide his grey eyes and returned her defiant glance reproachfully. 'I have very little acquaintance with Miss Anne Macdonald,' quoth he; 'I merely wish her well; and I may say this is the first time I have been able to comprehend that I could have anything in common with Mary Aldour, and without flattering myself either.' Mary did not know why her feverish eyes sunk before his, but she was conscious that her heart was heavy as lead.

Mary was very busy explaining to the women in the House how Anne liked everything, and trying to render the oak parlour as habitable as possible in the absence of so many of its accessories, as an atonement for her impulses. She wondered how Anne would feel; if the deserted house would appear desolate to her, or if the proud sense of proprietorship would console her. At last Anne's post-chaise drove up, and Anne's sweet face was stuck out of the window to hail Aldour again, just as it had been projected to bid it farewell.

Oh! how happy Mary was to be sensible of all the chagrin of the last few hours dissolving at the mere sight of Anne's dear lineaments like a bad dream—to know, as she embraced Anne, only delight at the return of her friend, at the restoration of such an intelligent, cultivated, wise, sympathetic companion as Flora and Catherine could not be to her for years.

'What! you had all gone away,' cried Anne, in dismay, 'and I am too late? But I feared something a great deal worse when I saw only Aldour and Mary come out into the porch. You are sure all the rest

are well. Then, I am going home with you to them. No, I thank you, Mary ; I don't want your company up here by myself. How could you imagine such a thing ? I want my dear Aunt Macdonnel and all the rout of bairns, and Flora and Catherine and Charlie. Are they all grown out of my recollection ? you know I had but a glimpse of some of them the last time ; but Charlie has been at our house in George-street in Edinburgh. I am not a bit tired ; I can walk with you, or you can ride with me, as you please. You will know when to pull the check-string. I confess I have not much recollection of the Tannach that you speak about ; but I'm all impatience to be there, since this is Aldour so altered that I vow I don't know the place again. You must make room for me there the best way you can, Mary ; I'll not take up much space, and I like a crush, and you won't mind it yourself ; you would put yourself about for any poor old body of the clan, wouldn't you, dear ? We'll manage better afterwards, but I must be in the middle of my kin, that is clear. Did I travel all the way from Edinburgh, and would not hear of waiting for Uncle Galbraith, or anybody else, to be a lone woman in Aldour ?

Thus Anne lodged herself and all her gifts in the heat of the throng at the Tannach, and had such a horror of being expelled before her plans were matured and carried unanimously, that she herself proposed they should take the present opportunity of repairing the roof of the house of Aldour.

While we are all here in the summer months, Aldour, and it will be ready for us in the winter, I suppose. Your experience will settle the point.'

Aldour was quite ready to follow Anne's suggestion, and had indeed a kind of melancholy satisfaction in anticipating its execution. 'There is a long purse come with my cousin, Anne Macdonald. Eh! Anne, you must take back the family name; your father did not foresee that this would be the way of it; but there will be no more straitened means and staved-off improvements in Aldour—the glen will not decline in the Country; it has met with no misfortune, only poor Charlie would have been a gallant Laird to see; but he will be a pretty soldier, the Lord preserve him; and Malcolm must follow him, though he should volunteer into the Fencibles. Mr. Cormac will not deny that he has enough wit to be sabred or shot; it is little Niel who has the brains to spare.'

Mary and Mrs. Macdonnel had their own thoughts. 'We must not hamper and hang upon Anne; she shall not be burdened with us as poor relations; she must bring up her South-Country friends; she may—sure she will marry.' No; they both knew in their secret hearts that was incredible in the meantime, improbable ever. But Anne was set upon being with them in their confined accommodation, over which Mary had been mourning even before Anne came.

'It is all very well in summer, but in winter—unless Charlie and Malcolm are gone—how we shall

be cribbed and stowed away under each other's eyes and ears. I feel I am a bar upon these poor girls. I wish my mother would allow me to remain constantly with Annie. I think, though my temper is not good for every-day occurrences and thoughtless chatter, I would not be impatient or unkind as a nurse. Oh! dear, it is very wrong of me. I may have nursing enough.'

But Anne was a delightful inmate of a house—agreed with every one—helped every one; not because she was a flatterer, but because she had two of the qualities which obtained the Beatitudes. She was pure of heart, and she was a peacemaker.





CHAPTER XX.

CHARLIE'S MISTRESS, AND HOW SHE BUCKLED ON HIS SWORD.

XET Anne was changed: it was not that she was love-lorn, moping, and miserable, or only elated by the excitement of her benefits to her chief and his clan—and that was a great joy to Anne—in her singleness of heart, she would rather for their own sakes that her cousins of Aldour had continued untouched by adversity, but since they had been exposed to it, it would have been great nonsense to pretend that it was not an extraordinary happiness to Anne to start to their rescue, and devote a large portion of her fortune to redeem Aldour, and to have her own views, not so romantic and absurd as the world might suppose, but when they were thoroughly fathomed, quite solid, prudent, pertinent views of its destination. But altogether, independent of the re-purchase of Aldour, Anne was as contented and much livelier than when she first came into the Country in her delicate, opening bloom. She was as sweet a woman as ever, and decidedly more spirited

than formerly. Mary was puzzled and surprised. We can all understand the uncomfortable confusion of ideas of the gentle pastor of Laggan, when he heard that the slim and sentimental young lady of the perpetual friendships and moonlight rambles of the Fort Augustus days of early acquaintance, had in course of time grown fat—a fat, middle-aged woman! We have all experienced something of the same mild shock—we have all cried out for days every time the subject was raised, in a like tender haze, ‘Bless me! Miss Anne Oury grown fat,’ and remained perfectly unconvinced after the most solemn assurances and corroborations. Mary Aldour was almost as much taken aback to find Anne Macdonald in a short twelve months grown independent and observant, shrewd and humorous.

The fact was, Anne, with her excellent judgment, and her sense of the pathetic, had always possessed a quiet penetration and a perception of the ludicrous; but then it was capacity latent and under abeyance. Anne's position as an orphan, in a girl of feeling, had rendered her shy, and thoughtful, and a little pensive, and inclined to reserve her own immediate impressions for her own study—and pondering on them alone, a dreaminess stole over them. But Anne was driven out of herself, forced from her more imaginative bent, and even from her sedentary pursuits and occupations. An upright, reasonable girl, she knew the course that would confirm her malady, and she knew that its indulgence would be a folly and a sin. So Anne had

been almost as active as Mary within the last year ; almost as noticing of her neighbours ; almost as energetic in discovering abuses and instituting improvements. Therefore Anne reappeared among them ready, resolute, and, although very kindly, not without racy ridicule in her speech and behaviour—healthy in body and mind. Now, if Anne were to live and die Miss Anne Macdonald of Aldour, she was tolerably certain not to disparage the brave old spinsters of Scotland.

‘ Happy ? I am as happy as the day is long, my dear,’ Anne assured Mary calmly and cordially when they had come back from a visit—they visited together, as formerly, at Croclune and everywhere—Croclune wanted its sting without Mrs. Maclean, it had become quite a tame, harmless locality ; Mary had been mercifully spared Flora’s mock condolences ; but this visit had been to Dunglas (Anne’s first visit to Dunglas, after all), to greet the young couple on their return from the grandeur and renown of Bath ; and to Mary’s indignation and scorn—first, Nancy did not wait for the privacy of a *tête-à-tête*, but publicly rated John Dunglas for his churlishness, to the music of his derisive laughter ; and next, John took the opportunity of mounting them, to reflect on Nancy’s finery, and her imperiousness to Mary and Anne—to Anne, of all the persons in the world !

Mary was inclined to conclude that Anne might believe herself well quit of him, might bless her stars for her escape from any approach to such a life. Certainly, John Dunglas did not grow wiser or more de-

licate-minded under his lot. Ah! dear, but this was very different from yon parting on the moor of Aldour—yon last kiss—yon consolation for this life with the world that was to come.

Anne might remark the discrepancy, and dread that Mary might misinterpret her, and be hurt by her, for again she alluded to the wooing of John Dunglas—in the cold grey of the night, when the fleshly tabernacle does seem to be laid down for a while, and we stand confessed to ourselves, with all our motives and inspirations, our hopes and aims shrunk or expanded into their true proportions, and all unveiled—then Anne spoke freely, heart to heart, to Mary on this subject once more.

‘Did you reckon me heartless, Mary, and dreadfully worldly, when I wrote to you so queerly in answer to your sad letter about leaving Aldour?’

‘I confess, Anne, I was confounded and grieved; but it is all explained.’

‘No, not all. I had heard it already from John Dunglas. Yes, it was communicated to him in the South, and I took it very kind of him that he immediately forwarded the news to me. Do you think me heartless—do you hold me worldly on another point, Mary Aldour?’

‘Never, my dear girl, but——’

‘First tell me, Mary, do you suppose that I am glad I did not share my fate with that of poor John Dunglas—that I shrink from him as he is now—that I could ever shrink from the man who made me a widowed

woman in spirit? For if you do, you are much mistaken. But I am not dumpish; I don't seem to be set aside—not a bit—I am mostly so busy and cheery, that I believe it is all made up to me. Do you remember the text, *Mary*, about whosoever shall leave father and mother, wife and child, house and land, for conscience' sake—to the end?

'My dear Anne, I considered these words to apply entirely to voluntary sacrifices incurred for conscience' sake, and not to incidental losses, which we must endure as we can.'

'Then I think you are wrong, my dear. I am quite certain they have a more general signification. Indeed, your faith cannot be very clear otherwise. You give ground for asceticism when you speak of voluntary sacrifices, and you deny a superintending Providence when you go on about incidental losses. Who sends us both losses and martyrdoms—which are not voluntary, *Mary*, unless we are mystical, mad, wretched priests and nuns—wretched in our ecstasies, because they are false? Only think, *Mary*, if we literally believed that verse as referring to all our disappointed hopes and departed joys—if we treated them simply as things which our great Creator and Redeemer withheld or withdrew from us for our own great good—He, who is infinitely wiser than we are, appointing what we should resign, and assuring us that should this or that be relinquished for His sake and the Gospel's, we should receive, in this life, a hundred-fold, in the world to come life everlasting—how dif-

ferent our trials would appear ! How many fears would be spared ! How many regrets stifled ! How much shame would flee away ! Fear, regret, and shame —how could they co-exist with peace, honour, and immortality ? The greatest blessings of time—what are they compared with heavenly blessings ? My dear, we would be almost in danger of craving crosses to perfect our patience, only the flesh is weak, and this is one of the rare instances in which the heart of man is apt to be humble.'

A result that followed Anne's being converted into an alert, ingenious woman, never wearied, and full of plans and projects, was, that it obviated any necessity for Mary Aldour's becoming her interpreter, executor, and prime minister. Mary had determined, 'I will never fail Anne ; I will save her all trouble ; I will cause her to be beloved and respected as she deserves ; I will walk and ride for Anne, while she sits, and reads, and works ; I will be content to be the dispenser of her bounty, the reflector of her glory ;' but when she found that Anne was disposed to be up and doing, that almost unaware of any contradiction to her former customs, she would be abroad with Aldour and Charlie, receiving information, getting acquainted with what concerned her so nearly, acting even more promptly than they suggested, although always modestly, and with the most respectful and complacent deference to Aldour, then Mary discovered that here, also, she was superseded, and, with whatever pain, she submitted discreetly and affectionately, without

haughty resentment. ‘ It is a great deal better so. Anne should go about among the people herself ; I will never stand between them ; but I might have done so when I did not mean it. Child, you will not misunderstand me, you will not palate sorry mischief. I’m always at your command ; but let me tell you I have been a great deal too much in the public, at the command of the glen and the Country. Mackie must not appeal to me again ; she and I must learn another lesson ; I will be angry with her if she does not. It is high time I had retired into private life, and devoted myself a little more to myself and my family. I will be vastly improved by sinking into a nobody. I always thought so ; and I ought to cultivate the girls, form their minds and tastes, and read and sew with them a little. I should not wonder but it will be the making of me yet. And Mary gave a bold outward indication of her change of position by putting off her riding-habit, and confining herself strictly to a suit of the most pacific, slothful leno, and a little cap.

Anne was reluctant to lose Mary’s constant companionship ; but she suspected that Mary was right, and allowed her to take her decision.

It is hard to pursue the most laudable career and encounter no untoward circumstance. Anne Macdonald was a godsend to the Aldour household ; she preserved the estate in the old family, through herself she still linked it firmly to the original owners ; her refinement and reason, her good breeding and

accomplishments, not to speak of her merits, were an excellent study for the younger girls ; her friendship was an invaluable boon to Mary ; her pleasantness brightened up the whole circle—but then there was Charlie.

Charlie was like his father, manly, and, at the same time, soft-hearted. Charlie was likely to fall a victim to the first tolerable young woman who crossed his path. Charlie had the honest paternal partiality for superiority. In an incredibly short time Charlie was prostrate, felled at Anne's feet, pierced through and through by the love-darts, which, like the little sylphs buzzing about Belinda, were constantly hovering, in spite of her, in the neighbourhood of a good and elegant woman such as Anne Macdonald.

They may write as they like about blushing girls and their sweet inexperience and ignorance, there never was an enslaver for a lad of Charlie's stamp to be compared with a fair, wise woman, capable, entertaining—with an easy, genial sway ; and a fatal enslaver she is, for once encountered it is a question whether he will ever again see her equal. Poor Charlie—big, loyal, devoted fellow, who in his bashfulness and constitutional heaviness made no great show in polite society, but who would be a pillar in any situation where pluck and heart had fair play—staunch in danger, tender in sorrow. It was a woful pity that his clan's good fortune should be his bane. Mary speedily recognised the impending evil threatening their restored repose ; she warned, she im-

plored, she reproached Charlie in vain. Charlie and she had not been such fast friends lately. Charlie would not be restrained by an elder sister, while he was decidedly urged on by the breathless, blushing interest of the younger girls in his affairs.

Charlie would not be distanced either by Anne's gentle hints or Mary's brusque remonstrances. Charlie knew very well what he was about, and fancied himself master of all the bearings of the case. He was not Anne's equal ; but what man was on a level with so sensible and sweet a woman ?—he would yield to none in valuing her. As for Anne's year of seniority and her fortune, vigorous Charlie whistled them contemptuously down the wind — his man's arm could shield Anne, his man's heart could worship her, and what did he care for Anne's fortune ? he saw no more propriety in its separating them than in its uniting them. Then there was that old story about John Dunglas. Bah ! all girls had their first loves, and John Dunglas, married and settled, was surely no rival in his way. Charlie shook his plaid over his broad shoulders, and looked out on the world with eyes as clear, though not so keen as Mary's, and decidedly declined to be depressed. Certainly Charlie had no faint heart, whether or not he won his fair lady.

Mary had some thought of seeking her father's and mother's interference, but she feared that Aldour—poor Aldour—in the child-like docility so thoroughly welded with his Celtic fire and pride, righting himself

after his tumble, standing on his legs again, walking abroad canny and canty, reconciled, dear good man, to re-enter the world as his cousin Anne's manager and factotum, was secretly contemplating this coincidence with dawning pride and delight, as the grand, blessed termination of all their woes. Her mother, Mary was finally convinced, was of too unbending and undemonstrative a character to meddle, if she could help it, or to meddle with success if she tried it.

Thus matters stood, when one day entering the little family den at the Tannach, which smelt of peat smoke and heather like a shieling, Mary discovered the different members of the family dispersed on their various concerns, except Anne Macdonald and Charlie. Anne had her handkerchief at her eyes, and Charlie leant doggedly on the table, where lay a conspicuous official letter, with an imposing proclamation, 'On His Majesty's Service,' on the back ; and Mary knew at a glance that an explanation and crisis had taken place.

Charlie's commission was come, procured, as everything else seemed now, through Anne's influential friends, and presented by Anne ; and Charlie, instead of being charmed at the prospect of activity and enterprise, and the chance to make his way in the world, to be useful and respectable, if not prosperous and famous, and not to sink into a contemptible hunter, and groom, and *hail-fellow-well-met*, like Finlay Robertson, had audaciously flung the document from the War-office on the table before him, and proclaimed his intention to have more or less

from Anne—all favours or none ; and Anne was refusing, and apologizing, and coaxing, and—clever, experienced woman as she was, crying.

Mary would have retired precipitately. If Charlie would make a fool of himself, she need not be present ; it could not be an agreeable spectacle for her to witness. But Anne caught, as she had done in a former instance, at the support of Mary's influence and authority, forgetting or ignoring the increase of mortification to Charlie. ‘Oh, Mary ! do you inform Charlie how unkind he is, and how he is punishing me.’

Then Charlie would have turned his back and stalked out in the utmost dudgeon, but Anne, without the least fear or scruple, placed the shapely, womanly hand, which Charlie coveted so passionately, on his coat-cuff, and held him by it as securely as a bold individual may collar a refractory dog.

‘Charlie, I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself ; you are punishing the whole of us ; you are affronting and insulting Anne.’

Mary was determined to be prosaically severe, while the fact was, her heart was bleeding so profusely for Charlie, that for the moment she was guilty of a prejudice against Anne. I warrant no good woman could see a young brother so humbled without her gorge rising for the hour ever so unjustly. The hard case was, that this was one of the few disappointments from which very few men rise wiser and better. Not one man in a thousand is improved by an early

wound to his affections. In Mary's day, probably on Werter's authority, a failure in the grand passion was considered an excuse and warrant for all failures : so, what business had Anne to bewitch Charlie Aldour ? Surely, with her tact she might have prevented it.

'It is Anne and you who insult me,' protested Charlie, stoutly swelling into the model of a handsome, wrathful young chief.

And Anne herself was distressed by Mary's austerity. 'Oh ! don't be so harsh to the lad, Mary ; he has not grown old in care, as we have done.'

To hear how these two young women spoke like grandmothers to this young man ! To think how differently they had regarded such sport from that facile youth, John Dunglas ! And how this summer, which to the one had been so sore, and to the other so determinedly commonplace, would shine on to him with a tremulous golden glory upon the heather, ominously culminating in splendour to this scene in the little room in the Tannach, with the window thrown open on the far-extending moors and glens, with the noble capercailzie and the flaunting fox-glove he had brought in for Anne's pencil and brush lying unheeded on the table, and that commission, that cruel commission, as he was tempted to consider it, so long the sole object of his dreams, unopened and spurned from him, bearing the bird and the flower company—all stamped as with hot irons on his heart and brain, and making him grave, every time he recalled it, to his dying day. While to the girls it

was but a slight, vexed memory, mellowed and melted by the tenderness of the sex into something to be thought of with a smile and a sigh. Heigho ! in what opposite lights we view things ! How great the odds when we are principals or subordinates, and how impossible, nay, unbearable it would be for the heart to contain more than its own romance, and more than its own bitterness.

'Charlie Aldour,' pleaded Anne Macdonald, her soft voice faltering as Mary had not heard it for many months, 'I am as sorry for this as I could be for anything short of your sickness and death—the more that I know all the misery of a rejection. No, don't interrupt me ; you see I will speak of it for your sake. And mine was so causeless, so incredible to my vanity and my regard ! But, dear Charlie, it will pass away, the bruise will heal, leaving you a little lonelier, a little more indifferent to the future perhaps, a little as if a rude hand had rubbed off the earthly bloom of your spirit ; and unless you carried it close to heaven it would be dull and dim ; but if you did that, it would be fresher and brighter than ever, and you would remain very manly, very human, very contented and happy for the rest of your days. Believe me, Charlie. And what I wanted to say, besides, was that if, at the worst, *he* had asked me to let him do a thing for me, just to prove his real fondness, and deep sorrow, and our eternal communion, I would have consented—I would have consented gladly, Mary will bear me witness. I

cannot love you, Charlie ; I cannot marry you ; I don't expect to marry any man, and it is perhaps manly in you to say, "Then don't mock me with offering this commission, or letters of credit, or recommendation—I will have none of them ; because you don't give me what you do not have to give, I refuse to strike hands, and be faithful friends for ever after ;" it may be manliness, but it is a gross manliness—there is meanness in the doggedness ; it would not have been what Sir Philip Sidney or any of our heroes and favourites would have done, unless indeed Charles XII., and I always hated Charles XII. The Czar Peter would not have done it ; he had too great a heart, rough and violent as it was. Oh ! don't you see, Charlie, it is far easier for you to be petulant and stubborn, and to grieve everybody, than to shake hands and be friends, and say, "I forgive you, Anne, and while you remain at home and take care of my land, I will go out into the world, and fight battles for you, and perhaps I will be spared to come back, and hang up my sword and pistols with worthy pride among the other weapons, and the stags' horns, and the scythes and spades, which we have so often laughed at in the dear heroic, homely hall of Aldour ? And you will sit down in the chimney-corner—not the first general who has returned to Aldour—and Mary and I will wait upon you, as the women did upon the chiefs in Homer ; but I shall always claim you as my soldier, Charlie Aldour."

' Rest content, Anne, I will be your soldier,

though I cannot be your wooer and winner. You say true, at least I can be your servant. There is no shame—I swear there is great dignity in bearing yours and the king's commission,' cried poor Charlie, huskily, with a faint smile tearing open the enclosure, drooping his head though when Anne came up with Mary, and hung about him and applauded him.

Never mind, poor Charlie, many an erect head, superb in its golden collar of success, is not so honourable as your bent neck weighed down with its halter of loss and defeat. Many a mouth pressed up to the cannon's mouth is not more brave or self-denying than yours when it spoke that assent. Let us be thankful for chivalry wherever we find it; above all, in the clumsy, sulky cubs whom it may convert into steadfast, stately, peaceable men.

Actually, after Charlie's example, Mary ceased to demur to the diminished family's removing with Anne Macdonald from the Tannach to the House, as soon as the roof was 'thaiked right and tight,' fortunately it was not in a windy region, and did not need the stones at the end of ropes depending all round it like frozen tears fixed to eyelashes, to prevent it being lifted up bodily and carried away on the wings of the tempest, as was incumbent in Skye. The removal was completed before the autumn set in.

It is difficult to show how common and simple such family arrangements were in the Highlands at this period—how they existed without a sense of obligation or dependence on either side. How many sisters

resided with married brothers ; how many cousins were niched comfortably and satisfactorily into cousins' houses ; and how, above all, a couple of grandparents and a dispossessed Laird, like Aldour and his descendants, were regarded as something sacred—elevated rather on a dais in a kinsman's house than reckoned an incumbrance. Only very restless, turbulent persons, or very malicious spirits, like Flora Robertson's, would have ventured to pronounce it unbecoming or unadvisable. It was one of the beautiful and touching relics of what was good and true in feudalism. It was seen in Aldour's case when he was restored to his old house, and strode through his old glen with all his old authority, and very nearly his old satisfaction, attended by Anne instead of Mary as a most dutiful and able daughter. When the old hospitality of Aldour, maintained now from a full income for the Country, was no longer pushed to extremity by the sharp goads of a perturbed mind and a breaking heart, but was tempered by modest sobriety and discretion, so that it would have defied the most stern moralist to condemn it on the score of impropriety and excess, it might have convinced and converted scepticism.

The ladies, who it seems are alike the malcontents and the bugbears now, did not then behave worse than the gentlemen in the peculiar circumstances in which, according to present annals, they abound in malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness. In the

terrible instances of stepmothers, maiden aunts, and sisters-in-law, and—horror of horrors, mothers-in-law, hundreds and thousands of proofs could be brought of their former frankness, cordiality, perfect tolerance, and gentle affection, under the most aggravating details. But, to be sure, they were educated then to submit and obey, to consider self-restraint a cardinal virtue, and an obliging disposition and sweet temper chief charms. Even had Anne Macdonald married, it would not have greatly altered the state of affairs. The Country would have cried shame on the man who entered Aldour, and did not behave to the old Laird with the most entire respect and the most careful consideration ; and who could for one moment suppose that Mrs. Macdonnel, and Mary, and the girls, and the delicate children, were other than a large, agreeable, as well as unavoidable family circle ready made for him, for which he was really to be envied, as affording him all the variety, stir, liberality of tone and action of a large, independent, but harmonious household. It was a characteristic of the glens—these relations of every tint — these overflowing houses—this unsullied, unsuspected hospitality. An old Highlander would have left the house of any man who boasted of the advantages of a narrow establishment, plenty of servants, of course, but only a poor silly wife and an isolated row of boys and girls over whom to crow king—perfect facility to lord over your own—not a single demand, unless of the most strin-

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gent description, to the wife of your bosom and your own flesh and blood—on your manliness and your generosity.

On a soft autumn day, when the leaves were falling yellow into the loch, and the bracken was straw-coloured and russet, and the heather like the mantle of a king, and the crimson berries of the honeysuckle hanging thick in the porch, the Aldours retraced their steps as they had never hoped to do. Alister was permitted to play his gleeful Macdonnel's Gathering, though the Laird was still fain to dispense with a concourse of his brethren. The humiliation was too recent, its effects were yet upon him. Did he not return to his own through the charity of a girl?—did he not hold it through her loyalty, which insisted on recognising him as her natural head? But through the old hall, much as it was formerly, and into the oak parlour the household trooped back, and for the 'Doch-an-dorroch' which they had missed at parting, they warmed bravely the house that was now Anne Macdonald's.





CHAPTER XXI.

FINRALIA'S CROWN.

WILL you come over to Finralia, Mary Aldour? Ussie craves your company—she wishes to see you once more;’ and Mary rose at once and complied. She had heard that the winter had dealt hardly with Miss Ussie’s frailty, but she did not know that it had gone to extremity with her.

Yes, Miss Ussie lay a dying in the old house of Finralia, and people said nothing could happen to the glen that was of less moment to its welfare, it was the least loss it could undergo, and that there was nothing to lament in so blighted a life coming to a premature close. But one might have denied that, as far as the living were concerned, and to Mary it was all dreary, the season, the dilapidated building, and one of the last of its descendants with the tainted breath of her father’s reputation hanging about her still, finishing her short, sad course in its wan noon. Poor Miss Ussie had kept a wayward sick-bed, but

even in its fitful fantasies and storms she had solved the problem of life which we are all trying so hard to read. As the little wise man of the Russian baron's castle to-day, and the court fool of yesterday, are seen at last lying strangely still and uttering not gleams and flashes of wit, but a broad radiance of wisdom streaming upwards to a land where they shall no longer be objects either of mockery or commiseration.

Mary found Miss Ussie very quiet, patient, and kind, no longer teasing Minnie sobbing, 'You're ower good now, Miss Ussie. Oh ! by your leave conter me—it'll may be set you up again, or else bide till we gang together.' She lay in a silent chamber, her pet beasts and birds dismissed, her work all taken from loom and frame, rolled up and laid aside at her order. Miss Ussie was there to die, and death was a monarch, and Miss Ussie, who all her life had clung pertinaciously to the indications of her rank, would not appear in this august presence in slovenly attire ; her body wasted to the bone, her brow damp with the death sweat, Miss Ussie wore with toil and effort her old costly brocade, her pearl necklace, her jewelled clasps—the only things the same ; Miss Ussie had nothing more to do on this side time than to die, and the ardent nature gave itself entirely up to the closing scene of its drama.

'I have sent for you, Mary Aldour, to come over and take leave of me, as the woman who extended her hand to me—and a firm, warm hand it was, though I scarcely feel its grasp now. Mary, you and I would

have been friends, had the balls rolled even between us.'

'We are friends, Miss Ussie. Can I do anything for you, dear Ussie Finralia ?'

'Yes, I am dear ; it is no phrase, I ken I'm dear to you at this moment, and I'm plain Ussie Finralia, as you are Mary Aldour. I like to believe it now. I'm no longer doubtful, scornful. Yes, Mary Aldour, you can do something for me. Finralia and Minnie will mind all my dumb creatures ; and Finralia will provide for poor Minnie, who has nobody to boast now. Eh ! Minnie's boasting was aye like a summer shower. But Finralia's own self, Mary Aldour ? Who is to take care of Roderick Finralia ? Mary Aldour, will you promise me to think of Rory ?'

'Ussie, Ussie, what can possess you to make such a request of Mary Aldour ?' cried Finralia, hoarsely, standing there, his brown cheek sallow with care and grief, his eye dim with watching. Forgive him, Ussie, for he loved you well, and he would have resigned every hope he cherished to give you health and strength; he would have lain down in your place to have you stand in his room. But he bent forward with his heart throbbing wildly for Mary Aldour's answer.

'I will do what I can, Miss Ussie,' answered Mary, with a thrill through her heart.

Finralia could not trace the electric influence, and so little did he hope from the engagement that, for the first time, despair clutched him, and caused his stout heart to break down. 'Stay with me, Ussie, we were

alone together. None could know what we did—none could be to us what we have been,' groaned Rory Finralia.

'No, dear Rory,' cried Ussie, faintly, but still calmly, and very fondly. She kissed his great hand over and over, pressed it to her cheek and her brow, and crooned over it as a mother broods and murmurs over her child. Miss Ussie's boat was all but launched on the tranquil bosom of a tideless sea, and Finralia, with all his power over her, could not pull it back to the heaving waters of this troubled life. 'No, Rory, I would not stay even for your sake. It will be better for you when I'm yonder. Here you have seen me weak, and crippled, and ugly; yonder you will behold me strong, and swift, and beautiful. I have been a thought and a sorrow to you, Rory; I've often been an imp of mischief in your house; but you forgive me, Rory, and I hope the Lord of Grace will forgive me too. I will grow a sweet, blessed memory; and if I may, I will come down a pure, tender angel, and hover over our dark Finralia, after I've told our fathers that Finralia is redeemed. What though it be at a distance, when the distance is ever lessening, my brother? And I see your crown, Roderick Finralia; I did not err when I was persuaded that you would wear a crown, only I was sorely mistaken in its metal. Mary Aldour let in the first light when she spoke of a man saying meekly and manfully he was in the wrong; when she said those were the heroes who laboured hardest, and against the roughest wind and

the thickest darkness. Ah ! yes, Rory, we did not understand when we stood sullenly aside, and only refrained from evil, when we raged that we were forsaken by our fellows ; ay, when we murmured against our very Maker. That was not the road, yet the path was clear, and the crown hung high overhead, right in our sight. "A strong heart to a steep brae," Rory, and that brae to amend the wrong, to suffer as it seemed unjustly, to bear what our poor, sinful fore-fathers brought upon us, and die in the toils, retrieving their crimes, and restoring the ruins that the unhappy men and women made of truth and virtue, until their name is a new name, and their glen is a habitation blest as Aldour. Keep the crown, Rory, and wear it in the sight of God and man. The God-man will guide you, arm you, and support you ; to save us, He wore such another ; He came down and bore the humiliation, and endured the shame ; He founded for His brethren a fresh manhood, and opened for them the gates of Paradise. It is straight now, Rory, all that was ravelled before. The world is a conflict where crueller gashes are dealt than ever were cut by the old claymores ; but oh ! thank God, it is not aimless ; it has a grand rallying cry ; grand is the progress of the campaign, and grander the proclamation of peace that will come at last. Oh ! pray to read it for yourself, Rory, in the pages of the Bible, and the sun in the sky, and the ranks of men ; and, Rory, aim hard and close at the crown.'

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'So help me, Ussie, I will do my best,' whispered Finralia, laying down his head.

'And you will keep your word, and the Lord will not fail, and you will wear the crown—the bravest crown in the Country. I aye said it, though I kenned not what I said. I would have given you the cold, glittering, fairy gold of this world, that turns to base lead on the brow which it cumbers and soils; but you will have the fine gold—the red gold—the burning gold of Heaven, Rory, which immortals can carry and not a hair of their heads singed, or their clothes bearing the smell of the burning. Farewell, dear Mary Aldour, our friend, who has succoured us in our need. When we three meet again, lass, Finralia will wear his crown, and stand like a king looking gently down on you and me.'





CHAPTER XXII.

' WOE TO THE VANQUISHED.'

HERE is a period in most men's history when, for their good, they see themselves beaten men; but it is not pleasant for mortal flesh and blood, and though the sufferers often endure it with a kind of Spartan stoicism, or better, Christian fortitude, it is a sore trial to faith and patience. Mary found it so this summer. She was back in Aldour, but all was changed; it was the same Aldour no more. All had been in the battle, and all seemed to have come out worsted, and with the soil of battle upon them.

Old Aldour the day's-man for his cousin, where he had been lord and master—Anne herself, however gay and good, with that scar on her heart which Dunglas had left there—Mrs. Macdonnel following Aldour with her head turned, like Lot's wife, after the weakly children, and her strong affections torn asunder—Charlie gone—Mary herself thoughtful and still, and for the first time in her life fully realizing a sedentary, quiescent existence—Miss Ussie dead and silent in

her grave, which, like everything else in Finralia, was the most forlorn of burial-places, nettles and docks disputing for precedence—and planted in no country kirkyard, among friends and dependents, but in sullen isolation, in a nook by the rushing water, full in sight of the windows of the grey house, and the gaping boles of the old castle.

And Finralia was changed most of all—a new spirit was in Finralia. The Laird had at last turned to his birthright, and taken to improvement and progress. A quarry was opened up in a gloomy scaur, drains were forming in the half-submerged haughs, fields were clearing from rocks and broom *cows*, the chip of the mason's chisel was heard making an undreamt-of stir and expectation in the neglected glen, and in truth a stone cottage here and there was rising with solid chimney and real glazed sashes, an immeasurable brightening of the old turf huts. And Finralia had feed a schoolmaster for the children of the clan, and there was a talk of a little kirk to themselves, where a minister would instruct their ignorance, and no better-informed, better-behaved, better-apparelled people would taunt them with their wildness and barbarism. Last of all, an architect had examined the dilapidated house and proposed a new face to it, and was in the act of drawing plans of an avenue, a court, and a garden, which should contain a labyrinth and a wilderness; as if these were the things wanted.

Why, Finralia must be about to take to himself a

wife, now that Miss Ussie was away, and he was busking the glen accordingly—the Country said. But Finralia's sole bride was the hard-featured but sterling wench duty, whom he had held at arm's length so long, and who was so harsh, and exacting, and unresponsive, that, though he had no wish to depose her from her place, the strong man was sometimes nearly rebelling madly, or fainting weakly, under her sway. And Finralia had his wounds. Finralia, more than any other, was recognised as a beaten man. Had he not first resigned Pitfadden's factorship, and next his offices in Inverluig—impoverishing himself like a hair-brained enthusiast and fool? Was not Finralia's strong mind unhinged? Had not solitude, and old offences, and the pride of Lucifer, which they attributed to him, literally driven him into eccentricity?—and once the world discovers one of its old princes eccentric, then, indeed, woe to the vanquished! There was nothing more to dread from Finralia's power, the man had disarmed himself of his professional weapons; there was nothing more to dread from Finralia's savage, sarcastic humour; he had been seized with strange rue, he had become a reformer. 'Is Saul, also, among the prophets?

It was like Timon of Athens stalking out of his den to feed the hungry and clothe the naked; to heap benefits on the untrue and ungrateful world; henceforth to know no law of retaliation but that of blessing—of good will doubted and denied, of kindness resisted and thwarted, of long-suffering inex-

haustible and divine. And the world, with highly characteristic and unsurpassable tact and tenderness, had its ugly, unclean satyr's laugh, its brutal, senseless rage. Finralia professing to be high-minded and disinterested—a hypocrite! a rogue! a double-dyed villain! Yes, in this world it is hard to find a place for repentance, even through much tribulation; but be thankful that we know where the rough road leads.

Mary was all dark and dismal on her own account; she feared that she was discontented, nervous; she could not settle to those studies and pursuits which she had arranged for herself, as she had intended. The leno suit and the mob cap were not everything, they were next to nothing; she was there in the body, reading and sewing with Flora and Catherine, but she was guiltily sensible that the spirit was awanting. Abroad in the glen, she still desisted from her old activity, unless where she could not snap personal ties. She continued to make it over to Anne, and Anne was so bright a pupil, so intelligent, and thoughtful, and blithe in spirit, so judicious with means, that Mary protested, in her listless mortification, that the people were better ordered, a thousand times better off, without her, though she lived on till old age in the glen, till she was at liberty to adopt Mistress Mary. Would that we had preserved such an era when our middle-aged women could proclaim their state, cover their thin hairs with decent matronly caps, and nod defiance to the sniggling boys and girls

stigmatizing them as still 'looking out for husbands.' She need never resume her posts as counsellor and caterer—at once mistress and servant.

Mary Aldour avoided her old haunts, she walked about abstracted and frozen; the glen's folk, in their delicacy, did not intrude upon her, but in their quickness and interest they noted the transformation. Something ailed Mary Aldour more than the family misfortunes, well ended. Was she sick in body or mind? How? Could she be crost in love? or had she been struck by an elfin arrow? Her own family were disturbed about her, but Mary was a ticklish person to meddle with. Mary's was just that intangible case to which it is impossible to prescribe. Mary herself could not have said what was the matter with her, only that she had been storm-tossed and was weary; only that she was still troubled and restless in spirit; only that she was beaten and could not submit to her proverbially hard portion, 'the redder's lick.'

The summer's sun rose upon Mary Aldour, and brought no relief; the tender verdure, inexpressibly tender in those glens, 'the time of the singing of birds'; the lusty summer; the brown and purple autumn; and still Mary was sickening, sickening with a common disease. The silver moon shone down upon the blue lochan and the honeysuckle porch, and did not stay her fever or bring her peace. Mary longed for the dark days of winter—black, biting frost or driving white rack—when the heart which

was struggling within might find some sympathy in nature struggling without. It was easiest for her to sit with her hands clasped on her knees and have the tumult of her thoughts deadened by the roar of the Spout Bahn, and feel its cool spray on her face, or to get into the boat and push it out into the loch, and let it rock among the waterlilies, as if they were lotus leaves lulling her to apathy and oblivion. It was not exertion, fatigue, exhaustion, which Mary craved, as Anne had done, to deaden the torture of the stab given, past and gone, and left to cicatrize and heal as it best could ; it was a heavy sleeping-potion, a drowsy drug, for which she stretched out her hand to render her betimes unconscious of the warfare just beginning—the blows and thrusts which she was only now in the act of receiving. An idle summer, dreamy, confused, only half conscious of its increasing care, half conscious of the resistance of no avail.

And the world saw them beaten ; yes, Mary knew it, the whole Country held them vanquished, one and all ; and Mary had thought herself quite indifferent to the world's opinion, and now set her teeth as she spelled over its verdict. When she considered her father's losses ; when Anne rode over to Dunglas in the dark, hoisterous night, because John Dunglas had sent to Aldour in hot haste for assistance to his dying baby, and Mrs. Macdonnel dared not leave Annie in one of her sick fits, and Mary was absent, storm-stayed at the Schoolhouse, the only night she had allowed herself to be detained this season—Mary

felt as if her spirit was leaving her along with her consideration for others. But she would have gone in Anne's room ; Anne to encounter the risk of cold and fatigue in their cause ; Anne to sit up nursing that poor child, whom its silly young mother had brought to this pass by her flightiness, and was in the end equally destroying by the unreasonable violence of her grief ! True, Mrs. Macdonnel of Dunglas was fond of Anne now ; and well she might, for had not Anne lent her sundry sums to pay off her Bath debts —those of them which she had contracted unknown to her husband, and declared she was frightened to confess to him, although she had very little hesitation in confiding them to comparative strangers ? Anne had relieved her on the promise that no more of such obligations should be incurred, for which the best security, as Anne owned, was that the Country might suffer women to hold diamonds, but they must never conjoin them with spades and clubs—only some of the old Lairds gambled inveterately at home, and that generally with their inferiors, and for comparatively trifling stakes—heads of cattle, fleeces of wool, stacks of corn—but all foolish women played at Bath and the great watering-places.

'But, my dear madam, you are not a Duchess,' remonstrated Anne.

'La ! no, Miss Anne Macdonald ; how I wish I were ! Am I like one ?'

Anne laughed. 'Not like this one, I hope—I mean it was only a woman, so mighty and so naughty as

the Duchess of Marlborough who could say “Books ! bah ! my books are men and cards.”

‘Dear ! what an outspoken woman ! how angry Flory would have been with her frankness !’

‘I don’t think it was her frankness that was to blame. Her heart was not clean ; she was a passionate woman all her life ; she loved pleasure ; she loved power ; and at last she loved money.’

‘And did she get them all, Miss Anne ?’

‘Yes, all ; and much good did they do her when she cried for her only son—when she raged like a fury for the loss of the Queen Anne’s favour—when she plagued the great Duke ; an unquiet, unholy life, my dear, an impudent old age, and a dreary death.’

‘Well, well ! I don’t know anything about her ; but I should not like to lose my boy—our heir ; and I believe it would drive John Dunglas mad, not to speak of that doting earle, old Dunglas. The child is certainly the thing John Dunglas cares most for in the world.’

‘I dare say ; next to his mother.’

‘Oh ! he does not mind me half so much—not more than he should do, I can tell you.’

‘I know he was very much vexed about your anxiety and distress.’

‘Yes, yes. He is a discreet enough fellow, he always was, you know, and he is good-natured when you talk to him. I wish you would persuade him that we might have a *whisky* like the one Pitfadden

has bought ; it is so absurd to suppose we must go everywhere on horseback. I am sure we need not always follow the bridle roads. General Wade's roads lead to nine places out of ten where we visit ; and I must say I don't see the obligation upon us to visit where there are no proper roads.'

'What, ma'am ! Think of the temptation of a merry dance across the braes at Kilmyre, and I hear there is to be a wedding at Dunsheugh soon.'

'Oh ! we could always make exceptions when we wanted. I did not say that we were to be for ever driving in the *whisky*. But is there to be a wedding at Dunsheugh ? Then I will certainly have a new gown ; I have not had one since I came home, and my Bath fashions are old things now. Baby must be better, then. I should not wonder that John Dunglas will be preposterous enough to propose me to stay at home, but when he sees me set on a party, he generally lets me go ; he knows by experience that I will not be more of a dowdy, housekeeper, or mother than I can help. "I must have my bit of pleasure," as the English ladies used to say ; but one is so out of the world at Dunglas, a little gadding so rarely comes in my way. The ladies of Flora's regiment and the Bath company pitied me so, you could not think. A young thing shut up among the wilds ! Now, I dare say if I had remained single Flory would have had me a great deal with her, as she has no family, and as I made Maclean laugh and kept him at home, and then very likely I would have

settled in England—dear, delightful, elegant England
—John Dunglas ought to consider all that.'

As it was, Anne supplied young Mrs. Macdonnel with patterns for work, induced her sometimes to sew them, and half convinced her that since she, Anne Macdonald, buried herself voluntarily in Aldour, it was not an incredible thing for her, Nancy Robertson, to dwell in the country in which she was born and bred, at the head of the establishment which she had been once so eager to attain.

John Dunglas said calmly there was nobody like Miss Anne Macdonald ; he should never think of comparing any other woman to her. Mary admitted that was something, but it was not a very great thing, and everybody did not hear him say it. Altogether Mary looked so put about by Anne's condescension, that at last Anne put it to her, sitting hand in hand, in the parlour window, at an idle moment.

'What vexes you, Mary ?' asked Anne. 'Why are you so stiff and discontented about my last visit to Dunglas ? It was very unexpected, to be sure, and not very comfortable. I was quite benumbed, girl ; I thought my blood would never give over tingling when it once came into a state of circulation again ; but I think I was of use. I could not be like your mother, of course ; but I was not frightened and distressed as they were, and I can testify they were very glad to see me, and to listen to my humble suggestions. I had seen my aunt's grandchild ill in the same way, and I could order a hot bath without

much hesitation ; and I assure you the doctor highly approved when he came ; and I declare, Mary, I shall always be thankful, and believe that I helped to save John Dunglas's boy's life ; he is such a bluff little fellow when he is well, so like Nancy Robertson when she is looking her best, and he is very good with me. I dare say if it had happened in time they would have made me his godmother.'

‘I dare say they would. They could have had the confidence. They might have been so unconscionable.’

‘But what ails you, Mary ? Is it for them or for me ? Are you going to affront me ?’

‘Never, Anne ! but you are too good for them—far. They make a tool of you. They presume, and other people will presume too.’

‘Not at all, my dear. At the worst they will say, “Miss Anne Macdonald is very mean-spirited, she goes and does a kindness to her old sweetheart's baby, she allows herself to be on terms of intimacy with her old sweetheart's wife, she does not object to slip into the place of their family friend.” It is quite true, this horrid scandal, and it breaks no bones and it won't hurt any one of us on our dying beds,’ maintained Anne, watching the sunset. ‘And there, Mary, the girls are walking up and down arm-in-arm, as we used to do at this hour. Do you know they had a little tiff this morning, but they have obeyed the injunction—not to let the sun go down on their wrath ? Pray correct them if the sentiment is undignified.’ But Mary did not make the amendment.

Mary Aldour did not meet Finralia so often as when their cares were at their height. He withdrew a little from Aldour, like a veritable bird of ill omen, when their skies were clearing; but Mary remembered Miss Ussie, and did not suffer him to pass her by entirely.

'Is it true, Finralia, that you have no office in Inverluig now?' she inquired directly, even though the occasion was so unworldly as the gathering after the chapel at Choillean, and Mary was at the same window from which she had looked out at the little linn, and secretly picked holes in her neighbours' cloaks, and guarded Anne jealously from the raven Finralia, and exposed her without a doubt to the moorcock Dunglas, a few days before she had sat on the haycock at Croclune, the centre of a circle, and undertaken to reply to Finralia's problem, 'What is truth?'

'It is quite true, madam,' answered Finralia, formally; and men could be very formal then, even when they were most in earnest.

'And may I ask why you have withdrawn from your engagements? Is it a fact that they cannot be held without undesirable conclusions? Can a gentleman not be the king's representative, in a civil as well as a military sense, without disparagement?'

'I do not pretend to say it, Mary Aldour. An honest man may serve his king and country in any respect without offence; and a man such as Aldour—yes, if Aldour could take care of himself,

by your leave, and were a lawyer, and I had the filling of my situations, I would nominate Aldour—he would hold them without partiality and without hypocrisy.'

'Why did you not keep them yourself, and do the best for them you could, Roderick Finralia? They may fall into improper hands; they may be farmed like the French taxes, and greatly abused.'

Finralia bowed to the implied compliment; a slight bow to a slight inferential expression of respect and appreciation. 'I have enough to do to set my house in order,' he explained with a grave smile. 'I must complete my work with speed; because I believe I will not continue long in Finralia.'

'Not continue in Finralia, after we have stayed on in Aldour? Not continue in Finralia now?'

Finralia reddened. 'I have done what a man could,' he said, in a low voice. 'I would have trodden out the past, and established a better memorial, as you bade me; but don't press me too far, there are bounds to a man's endurance. Ussie would not have asked too much of me; but you—you don't know what you demand. I said long ago that you were an arrogant, extortionate woman, Mary Aldour.'

'And what will you do?'

'I will never fling myself from the old castle wall, or leap into the Black Pool, in spite of Werter's example, that is out of the question. I will play the coward's part, and fly.'

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It was Mary's turn to play the coward's part; not that she retreated, but she cowered, and quivered, and coloured all over at his words, as if smitten with sudden anguish.





CHAPTER XXIII.

'A WOMAN'S CHOICE.'

‘**G**OOD Lord!’ cried Aldour, as reverently and fervently as he had ever spoken in his life, ‘there is dule enough in the Country this day.

Some of these reckless Finralias went out five days ago hunting in the snow, making a rallying-point of the old keeper’s hut on their side of the crags of Ben Falloch. They should have been back on the third day, when their provisions were exhausted, but they did not reappear; and Finralia followed them yesterday morning, and he has not been seen or heard of since. But the blast, and the swirl, and the drift have blown boisterously for the last twelve hours in that very quarter, and God knows, they may have all perished by this date, Finralia among the rest of them. There is not a man in the Country so wise, firm, and surefooted, and so well acquainted with every inch of the ground as poor, miscalled Finralia; and if his strength and sagacity failed to discern and disentangle his men

yesterday, there is small chance that any fresh succour will reach them living men, or dig them out corpses and drag them down to-day.'

The glens were dead in winter, and such a blast had raged over their sepulchre during the last night as Mary had wished to hear in the pleasant summer weather, to bear her bewildered heart and conscience, mind and will, congenial company. And such were the tidings which the wind and sleet carried to her, such was the deed they had accomplished.

All the women looked up with blank horror in their faces, and then they began to exclaim in poignant pity and distress; only one sat still as stone with the frozen hue and attitude of despair. None of the others noticed Mary particularly, except Anne; perhaps none else guessed her state from sympathy; for busy mothers and younger sisters are not always the best judges in these cases. Anne ventured at last to whisper a single sentence of tender commiseration, 'Don't believe it yet, Mary; wait and pray, dearest Mary.' But Mary was not the woman to receive commiseration, unless after long agony, unless brought very low by a fight of affliction. She was the woman to turn at bay naturally with her sorrow, to cover her wound with her hand, and step out bravely as before.

'What do you say, Anne?' she asked aloud, with the slightest perceptible dulness in her clear voice. 'I have no doubt Finralia will do well; he is so strong, and young, you know; and if he dies, he has

found the most gallant death of any Finralia I ever heard tell of.'

'Hold your tongue, Mary,' cried Aldour, angrily. 'How can you even the lad to such a fate yet? The Lord may bring him through safe and sound, above all since he has exposed himself for others. I hate to hear any one show a want of common feeling, and I declare you have done it, girl, though you might not mean it.'

Aldour was not so meek that he did not resent Mary Aldour's heartless indifference to the horrible danger and uncertain situation of their neighbour and his friend. He could do very little under the circumstances without uselessly endangering more life. He could only toil, up to his knees, half blinded, to an eminence which ordinarily commanded the widest view in the direction of Ben Falloch; despatch scouts down the open roads of the glens to obtain the latest intelligence; and eagerly plan setting out himself and examining the whole district when the gale, already on the decline, was further fallen, and the new day dawned fearfully on a faint hope of attaining his end.

All the time Aldour relieved himself by wasting a great deal of wit on Mary, covertly reproaching her for unbecoming intolerance to Finralia, summing up in an aggrieved tone poor Finralia's merits—what a fine fellow he had proved himself—repeating with emphasis that the Country would now discover that, notwithstanding miserable precedents, it had not held

a manlier, more faithful heart within its bounds than Roderick Finralia's.

Anne could not refrain from a little hint to stop the simple, honest, blundering mouth.

'Vex her!' exclaimed Aldour, indignantly. 'Well may she be vexed, well may she; but no, she won't ind it. Do you not know, Anne, that the poor fellow —the cleverest, prettiest man in the Country, and how could he help the misdeeds of his forbears?—was infatuated about that scornful girl, though he would not take the slightest advantage over her—I have reason to be certain of that—and I could have half forgiven him, for I am ashamed of having so proud a piece belonging to me, and it would have been but right that she had been pulled down in good time; not that she is not a fine woman, a noble woman, too, Mary Aldour, like her mother. I have good cause to mind that too, but hardness is that lass's bane; and poor Aldour went out again, quite unconscious of being inhumanly cruel.

At night the wind sank to a sobbing moan, and the stars came out again. Aldour was only detained by the twilight darkness and the headship over his wife and children, from setting out at once in search of his lost friend. He had to content himself with immense preparations for the morning's expedition, rummaging out as many horns, flasks, belts, and plaids as would have served for the relief of King Dagobert and his train of knights and squires, or the rear-

guard of an army like Napoleon's perishing in Muscovy snows.

The family were assembled in the parlour, talking of the calamity with a grisly relish, Mary imagined, when she stole out, wrapped in one of the plaids, and stood in the porch in the bitter cold, looking out, with mechanical eyes, on an iron world wrapped in its winding-sheet. Tree and bush were bent with snow ; the loch was as undistinguishable as ever was the Boden See ; there was a chill sameness over the whole land ; only the mountains rose up like giant crusaders in their white mantles, and truly they did guard a temple, and truly on them, as on every other material thing, the red cross might have been found carved.

Mary saw nought save Ben Falloch ; she remembered it in its summer dress ; she remembered how Finralia had trodden it that day as near her as any shadow, and yet as substantial and trustworthy as any staff to lean upon—as no shadow had ever been transformed. She remembered how she had desired to see the mountain bleak and desolate, and now Finralia lay there, taking such rest as the world had never given him, not grudged that white, spotless, glorious bed which a saint or an angel might have occupied, in whatever else he had been stinted, in his self-denial and cheerless efforts, in his struggles and trials.

Mary gave a great start. A figure was moving

across the frozen Loch—the figure of a tall man, muffled and shrouded in the grey plaid, the most ghost-like of draperies. Mary had often laughed at the superstition of her country-people ; but she herself was a Highlander, and it was in her blood. This thing had a wonderful resemblance to Finralia. Had his spectre come to upbraid her as her father had done ? to shake its shadowy hand and cry in hatred and rage—

‘The weeping blood in woman’s breast
Was never known to thee,’

since death had disenthralled it of those fetters of love which had held even free, bold Finralia in their invulnerable chains ?

The figure did not float in mid air, but scrambled up the bank opposite the porch, and, confronting Mary Aldour, stood motionless. Ah ! it was no avenging spirit, for its breath, the warm breath of a living man, rose between them in the frosty air. Mary gave a little thankful, pitiful sob, and sprang forward. ‘Finralia, you have returned. Your men are safe. You were right to come over to us. We have watched and waited. We are glad.’ She fluttered for a moment about him, then she took his two cold hands and drew him in through the hall to the parlour. ‘Father, Finralia has come back ; Finralia is here.’ There was such a high note of exultation in the woman’s voice ! She stood next him while they clamoured around him. She seated him in Aldour’s high-backed chair. She still sat nearest to him,

looking up into his eyes, and bending forward and hanging upon his words while he told his tale. Then all—even Finralia, with gleaming eyes, and bewildered air, still only half restored to this nether world—knew what was to follow. Aldour in open-mouthed astonishment—Mrs. Macdonnel in grave observation—Anne half in warm pleasure, half in quick, passing pain, half in anxiety, half in a sense of relief—the girls in a paroxysm of agitation, and, by the by, they were the only individuals who retired, and cried and laughed over the catastrophe, and then settled what gowns they would wear at Mary's wedding—the boy Malcolm, now with a grin, now with an aggrieved, affronted air.

Certainly, it was not a fair match—not yet, never. Neither was there any fault to be found with Finralia in these modern days; and if Mary chose to descend to him, Mary was a woman to take her mind of it. Yes, a strange mixture of despotism and liberty, submission and independence, was in the old family life of the glens.

Finralia described to Aldour minutely the course he had pursued on the mountain. How he had fallen in with his men, all save one, some way down the terrible descent. How they had been spent with their hunt, and forced to leave a disabled man, with the remnant of their provisions, in the keeper's hut behind them, while they hurried on for assistance, seeing the threatening state of the weather. How he had despatched them with double-quick step, while he

proceeded alone with his staff and dog. How the storm had broken upon them, and all but overwhelmed them, detaining the men six hours in a gully in the mountain-side, and compelling him to tarry with his crippled companion, feeding him, warming him, rousing him, and sustaining him, until they were in imminent danger of being buried alive ; and how he had started as soon as there was any prospect of the tempest abating, and travelled with his burden—a stupified, staggering, sickening man ; he might as well have made the descent of Ben Falloch in a snow-storm with a drunken man on his arm ; but Providence had been their friend, and by little short of a miracle they had arrived in Finralia a short time after the last of Aldour's scouts had started for Aldour. And then, as he explained, after he had been rested and refreshed, he was driven by the impulse of satisfying his friends on his behalf, and as it was but a step across the frozen loch, he set out again, and so came to Aldour. ' Yes, yes, Finralia,' Mary murmured, openly enough, drooping her head until it was almost hidden on his sleeve ; ' we were very miserable. Thank God that you have reached home.'

But Finralia spoke further to Mary when they stood in the porch at parting, and Mary felt no cold, for Finralia's arms were round her.

Mary had gone to the hall-door with him and her father to remark upon the weather, and had remained there after he had wished her good night, and Aldour had turned back to the light and warmth within.

Finralia stood still in the porch, and called ‘Mary,’ and Mary obeyed the summons as readily as if she had flown to the voice all her life. Finralia opened his arms, and the poor girl clasped her hands round his neck. She had gone through much trouble and distraction before she had found that natural refuge.

Finralia told her that at one point in their progress, he almost despaired of their escape; when the wind was howling over the barren moor, and the drift choking him, and settling in flakes and masses clammy and cold about his throat and breast; when his poor clansman was raving deliriously, and sinking powerless from his grasp. And then there came over him an ineffably vivid memory of Mary Aldour, as she climbed Ben Falloch with him on the summer day in the merry past, and, in spite of all objections, was associated with him, and stood with him alone on the summit of the mountain. And there followed an ineffable longing to see her face once more, an ineffable bitterness at the idea that he would die within a very few hours and never more behold it on earth. He had questioned himself in wild selfishness why he had perilled his life, become precious to him through his passion for her, on those unlucky, insubordinate clansmen of his, who had started against all counsel on this rash chase, and why he should throw it away finally on the unfortunate fellow at his feet, who seemed dying at any rate, whom he would never bring alive into the glen, and who was the most worthless and incorrigible of all

the notorious poachers and plunderers of Finralia ? and why, if he himself, with his civilization and social advantages, was not very much better, and if a touch of nature made the whole world kin, still, why waste two lives on scarcely the shadow of a chance of saving one ? Oh ! how could he give up the hope of being restored to Mary Aldour, although she slighted and repulsed him ?

Then there came singing towards him, above the scream of the curlew and the croak of the raven—all the living sounds he had heard, except the cracked voice beside him, since he had parted from his men—for the sheep and goats were long worn down from Ben Falloch—a voice lilting one of those chivalrous half-serious, half-light songs which Mary loved to sing to Anne's accompaniment on the harpsichord—

‘ I would not love thee, dear, so well,
Loved I not honour more.’

It rung through his brain, and his head went all spinning and whirling, partly with the cold and the toil, and partly with the magic melody and its associations. Then he lifted up his head and determined that he would die, if need were, for that honour, virtue, godliness, or faith in, and love to Christ into which it all resolves. After all, dying was easy, for at that moment the gates of heaven, which had so long appeared closed to him, seemed to open wide, and he had gazed into the blessedness with unwinking eyes, and he did not think he would ever lose the vision, or see them again locked and barred.

'No, never,' Mary said, with her head on his breast; 'for I can see Paradise in the distance dimly myself, and you know now, Rory, you are nobler than I.'

Finralia made no distinct answer at the time; probably it was enough for him to have the bright, fair, innocent-coloured hair, shining as poor Marie Antoinette's, and never sullied by the crown which held so many wilfulnesses, vanities, and follies in its dangerous circle, blended with his own, rusty and dark as the black den of Finralia; but he mentioned the matter many a time afterwards, when the looks of others showed him plainly what they thought of the discrepancy betwixt the pair, and when his own heart told him of it in grievous tongues of the past, which would wag uncalled for and unwanted.

'I wish my hands were clean, Mary Aldour; I wish I were without stain or reproach for my love's sake.'

'And I wish it, too, for your sake,' Mary would reply frankly. 'A man, upright from his birth—a pure man, like one of the old knights—the son of the righteous, with the least of the stain of original sin and the soonest wiped out, has a high and happy portion; but, Roderick Finralia, I do not think I would be a fit match for such a one, unless to try his goodness; he would better become my Cousin Anne. And I can vindicate my choice. I am not a clerk to quote Scripture to you, Rory, you must seek it for yourself, but what said the Apostle to those Corinthians who were once wicked? "Now ye are washed,

now ye are sanctified." If the angels of heaven rejoice over a sinner who has repented, I trow it may be permitted to a mortal woman—a sinner like himself—to be glad over one, and to have no fear to share his destiny. Oh ! Rory, a woman's love is nearest the divine. Heavenly love left the ninety and nine of the flock to follow after the one strayed sheep, and it was a woman who sought diligently for the lost piece of money, and who called upon her neighbours and friends to rejoice with her when it was found. Is it forbidden to a woman to be devoutly thankful when a man quits the error of his ways ; to hasten to the poor Samson when his hair has grown again, and the scales have fallen from his eyes, that her dear presence may abide with him ? Oh ! don't you think, Rory, many an old Christian woman of the Country wedded believably and trustingly with a newly-baptized Norseman or Dane ? And after all, Rory, at the foundation you are better than I.'

Mary Aldour adhered tenaciously to this conclusion —would not give it up for all Finralia's remonstrances —wrote it to her school-girl friends—talked her friends down with it in a very high, incontrovertible style—and with regard to former contrary expressions, cut the Gordian knot without the smallest difficulty by stating at once that she had changed her mind ; she was entitled to do it since she had ample ground to go upon.

Mary made Anne smile and sigh, caused Aldour to laugh aloud, and had her first and last quarrel with

Mr. Cormac Macgregor and Mrs. Macdounel of the Schoolhouse. Mr. Cormac granted that the fair was entitled to a choice, but he was so grim on the assertion of the right that Mary resented his concession. Mr. Cormac had an excuse; his mistress was forsaking him, and for a man who, though a little wiser than his fellows, made no great figure in the classics. Surely Mary Aldour might have had more feeling for the forlorn humanities.

As to Mackie, the provocation which she received was so great, that she fairly rebelled against it. ‘It is all very well, Mary Aldour, for you to condescend to Finralia if you think fit. You may make another man of him—everybody sees he is changed already. And marriages may be devised in heaven, they are so seldom completed on earth now. And you may think it right to be contracted, though I would have waited a year or two, by your leave, ere I threw myself away. There is no hurry. You could have taken Finralia when all was done, if a better had not offered. But to pretend that a fine young woman like you, the flower of Aldour, did not excel a questionable Laird of the house of Finralia!’

Mary put her fingers into her ears. ‘This is flat treason. What do you take me for, Mackie? If you do not acknowledge that Finralia is a noble man, as well as a pretty man—ay, as any you ever encountered, I will never speak to you again.’

If a modest, high-spirited girl is ever tempted to make love to a man, it is in the way of amends;

and it is not so unbecoming,—it is always an inseparable blending of boldness and shyness—a flush of rosy generosity overleaping the hidden white heat of true love. Beatrice meeting and marshalling her Benedict under his trying recantation is one of the prettiest bits in Shakspeare.

Mary did uphold Finralia ; she was not ashamed, she was proud of all he had overcome ; perhaps she learned to be fond of his scars. She went with him with her fearless, erect head, walking by his side into Finralia among old neighbours and foes, addressing Minnie, ‘ Yes, it is true, Mistress Minnie, I am coming to your glen.’

‘ Ah ! we will be glad to see you, Mary Aldour—we will be that, and that will we be. Miss Ussie will be a happy spirit that day. See, a blessing is coming upon Finralia at last, and the Lord sends his creature first for a sign.’

‘ Finralia needs no interloper. Finralia deserves the best blessing,’ Mary amended promptly.

‘ Finralia’s an honest man, but Finralia’s own self will tell you it is hard to live down sin,’ persisted Minnie, shaking her head.

Mary strolled with Finralia in Aldour, Finralia knowing very well that though her clansmen were delighted to have Mary Aldour a bride, they were not so pliable, or so dead to old antipathies, as to approve entirely of her destination ; and when Mary saw a very piqued or discontented face under curch or bonnet, and suspected a muttered ‘ Eh ! sirs, a fell-

like partner for Mary Aldour—that an Aldour should ever be buckled with a Finralia ! See to him !—he has their old cold look even in his wooing,’ then Mary said broad out to the unspoken objection—referring to the travel-stained man at her side, with his thoughtful eyes, and his mouth sad now when it did not sneer—‘ My bridegroom Finralia, I am showing you my bridegroom, Dugald.’ ‘ I am making you acquainted with my man, More.’ And to do them justice, most of the carles and carlines melted at the brave face and voice, and owned apologetically on her account, ‘ If Finralia is ordained for her, Mary Aldour must wed him ; and sure he has stood in her shadow, and haunted her side this many a day.’

Notwithstanding Mary’s devotion, ‘ I don’t know how I can reconcile myself to carrying you out of the sunshine, Mary,’ Finralia said wistfully, as they stood in the mouth of his glen, and looked at its northern exposure and its expression as if it had been well scoured by Boreas.

‘ We will have the more merit in our corn and trees, Finralia,’ Mary assured him. ‘ Besides, don’t you believe that you are able to bestow sunshine—that you are an Apollo driving the chariot of the sun in any direction you please—in fact, that you are sitting behind the golden horses to some persons ?’

Finralia laughed loudly, and the explosion was a good and wholesome one for which he was the better and the cheerier afterwards. ‘ I promise you that you have surprised me now, Mary Aldour. I have consi-

dered that you would brighten my life ; I never dreamt that I was to embellish yours.'

'Then, sir, you have shown a great want of discernment.'

Everything has its termination. These good folk of the glens had their fortunes settled for them, after which little more remained to be said of their lots, except that as the bough was bent ere it was stiff and stubborn, so the tree inclined for a long time to come. Mary Aldour used to sit before her fire, that faithful friend, for awhile of nights, staring into the ruddy embers, or poking among the white ashes, tracing back the threads of her history, declaring that their windings were passing strange, and the machinery which directed them so exquisitely fine and complicated that she should never cease to wonder at the pattern they had accomplished, while she comprehended that it could not have arisen without every one of those hair-like influences. Had Anne Macdonald not come into the Country, Mary might have wedded John Dunglas ; for she would never have brooked the rivalry with Nancy Robertson—she would have ended it abruptly before it had exerted its powerful sway over the young Laird. Had Anne not passed that second night at Croclune, and provoked most unwittingly the hostility of Flora Robertson purely through the affectation of that heartless fellow Maclean, John Dunglas might yet have freed himself and married the woman he honoured, and that couple would have come to Aldour's assistance in his trouble,

and Mary would never have understood Finralia. Here Mary's analysis always came to a sudden pause. And soon Mary grew too engrossed with the present and future to dwell on the past; and the next thing was, that she gradually became quite convinced that her life could not have been otherwise, and that 'not all the king's horses and all the king's men' could have prevented her following the fortunes of Finralia.

Mary Aldour copied the example of the great Fabian house; she marched out from the ranks of the aristocracy of conscious integrity, and embraced the cause of the democracy of rueful licence and painful return to loyal obedience. But the simile ended there. Mary did not suffer by the change of sides; there was no tragedy connected with her instalment on the foreign mount, no hostile tribe swept down on Finralia, and annihilated the daring young woman who represented the mighty Fabian house. Years rolled away; Finralia was constant, and slowly he won another sort of esteem. After long service he obtained his spurs, and was even permitted to put his hand on the crown which poor Ussie had promised him. A reformed man, Finralia, and no impostor; a good laird; a worthy gentleman at the last. What a boon to his glen! How the scene was transformed in a score of years! You would not have known the ungenial land; and Finralia himself, though a sober man, for the most part studied the text which bade him rejoice. Heaven knows, not a man among us has such cause to rejoice as a man like Finralia.

John Dunglas was one of the haughtiest and most rigid of Highland lairds, while Nancy Robertson was the loudest-tongued, most dashing of matrons, not without a touch of kindness about her that preserved its hold on her husband and on society. Mrs. Anne Macdonald of Aldour stood always her friend. There was not a trace of the past in their relation, save indeed in the sweetness of Anne to her noisy friend, and the exceeding durability of the tie which united two so much the reverse of each other, and in an opinion of John Dunglas's, yet expressed in moments of candour in the heat of the festivities of the Country —what John Willoughby would say of Marianne Dashwood—that you might speak of modern beauties, nymphs, and graces as you liked, but if you wanted to know what loveliness and elegance had been, you should ask some of those who had enjoyed the honour of being introduced to Miss Anne Macdonald, when she first came into the Country. Every witness appealed to cried out at the statement, his wife not the last or least; how absurd he was about an old flame; better say she had eclipsed her Grace the Duchess of Hamilton and Argyle; she was a very genteel, excellent, liberal, mild-tempered woman, Mrs. Anne Macdonald, as they all knew; but as to beauty —besides being Lowland bred, she was pale in face, and insignificant in figure—never even had the look of her cousin, Finralia's wife, Mary Aldour.

Anne would have taken their opinion coolly; it would have required a great deal more to disturb

the even tenor of her way—the calm, clear, hopeful tenor, so untroubled with mire and dirt, that the river of her life seemed to sparkle more and more, and grew still more ‘sillar’-like as it flowed nearer its end. Not that all Anne’s prospects were fulfilled; Charlie went abroad with his regiment, and remained there as if he never were to have done with active service. Although he had submitted to Anne’s will once on a time, he would not so much as speak of coming home and taking his property off her hands, albeit he was aware she had no other heir; and as she got an elderly woman, and his father waxed infirm, the charge was heavy on her, and would have weighed her down, had it not been for his brother-in-law, Finralia. Malcolm had followed Charlie, and his thick head was not only a good-enough bull’s-eye for marksmen, but was always in the way of knocks, so that it was a positive marvel that it was not cracked like a nut-shell again and again, and of course it became immensely more endeared to his family at home for this very reason, and they would not have valued it the more had it been stuffed full of erudition, like Mr. Cormac Macgregor’s, or his darling Niel’s.

Little Anne was not to be detained in her world of pain and weariness; she died young, and left Mrs. Macdonnel for the rest of her life with a sorrowful sense of being empty-handed, even when she was most busied about Aldour’s chair, and most interested in Glen Finralia.

430 MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS.

But Anne triumphantly ushered into the world of the Country Flora and Catherine, and had so grounded them and polished them, that they were wonderfully admired, although she had not Cinderella's faculty of wedding them to two great lords about her court; indeed, one of them was a dignified, sweet old maid like Anne's self, and the other foolishly engaged herself to a subaltern in Charlie's regiment, for whom she had to wait quite as long as Flora Robertson waited for the porcelain dandy, Maclean. There were silver threads in this other Flora's hair, and furrows in her round cheeks, before her establishment was completed; only, as the engagement had been entered into in all simplicity, truth, and duty, and Flora Macdonnel and her soldier were particularly honest, affectionate individuals, they were reunited with the greatest joy and gratitude, and their late wedding was a perfect byword in the Country for pure heartiness, contentment, and gladness.

Then Anne persuaded the boy's mother to trust Niel with her to those famous mineral baths and metropolitan doctors; and you may trust the writer, Anne neither gambled nor gadded, neither staked her purse nor her reputation. But the two combined forces applied to on Niel's account worked wonders for him, and braced him up into a mere delicate, crotchety genius. Then Anne travelled with him to college, installed him into lodgings, and would keep house for him months at a time, and so impressed him with her own virtue and unselfishness, that Niel ended by being a more

unmixed source of congratulation and delight to his kin than many a genius can contrive to be.

'We are not married, we have a' thing,' said two vindictive spinsters, when furnishing with a piece of tape an uncalculating matron niece. 'I am not married, and I have been permitted to do everything,' might Anne Macdonald have boasted.

And what though Anne had her little irregularities and peculiarities creeping upon her, notwithstanding her intelligence and cordiality, as age advanced? What though she was condemned to wear a few of the accidents of her condition—fell into little oddities, little obstinacies, little instances of ill-considered vivacity, entitling her to a subordinate station among those capital old spinsters? She was not much the worse for them, though Mary, in the depth and warmth of her regard, would lament to her true gossip, Finralia, 'Did you see the mantle that Anne wore at the Kilmyre roup, Rory? It is manufactured on the model of a green one a hundred years old at least; she had it the first day I saw her; and she was wont to be so nice about the fashions. You would not let me be so ridiculous, Rory.'

'It would not become you, Mary.'

'It does not become her a bit more, though it may be comfortable, as she professes; people should conform to rules, and not induce the impertinent world to stare and talk. Did you hear what she said to young Corryarrick when he undervalued Catherine Aldour's music? It was vastly rude of him, but he

has taste, I suppose, and he is a person of some consideration in the Country. "Sir, I think you might as well have counted on the cat's entertaining you with a saraband as on a Highland girl's witching the world with Italian bravuras. We have only Gaelic airs, and Lowland tunes, and Border ballads at Aldour. I warn you what you have to expect." Now, Anne was always accustomed to be complimented on her singing, and she has taught Catherine, and to my unsophisticated ears it is charming to sit in the porch or out in the boat and hear them ; besides, it never fails to enliven Aldour. But Anne should not have said that to young Corryarrick ; it would have been nothing from Catherine—but, from Mrs. Anne Macdonald !'

' You would have been tongue-tied, you would have feared the consequences to husband and bairns. You don't know half how prudent you are, my dear, as my mistress and the mistress of a family. Anne is an independent woman—a single woman, not to say a woman of property in her own right '

' Ay, you know you need not have finished with that, Finralia ; that makes no difference. And you need not take me off, Rory. Again, there is Anne carrying out her fancy for the Dunglasses ; always at their command, always to be consulted, and always to contrive means to please Mrs. Macdonnel and her unruly family. She will be fitting out the sons and boarding away the daughters, if John Dunglas's pride will swallow it. Did you ever fancy John Dunglas would be so proud a man, Roderick ?'

‘I don’t think it is altogether unaccountable.’

‘Ah! I won’t let you read Swift if you adopt cynical views of human nature. I found you a cynic, to be sure, sir, but I hoped to leave you a very honest, good-natured man.’

‘I am better-natured than you are, Mally; I am not so hard on the Dunglasses.’

‘The Dunglasses! they will be the death of Anne yet, if she goes on obliging them. I cannot forget how they had the huge presumption to send for Anne Macdonald the other night, all that road through the dark and cold to nurse their baby.’

‘Oh! Mary, Mary, now I have you, my good friend. You told me long ago they did not despatch a messenger for Anne, they only asked for your mother, and you have raked up the most ancient story in the Country to get the better of the Dunglasses. I am certain that event occurred before we were married.’

‘It does not signify when it happened if it took place at all; and undoubtedly they did not scruple to accept Anne when my mother was not forthcoming,’ Mary corrected herself quickly. ‘I wonder you defend the Dunglasses, Rory; I cannot bear that Anne should be so good to the Dunglasses, the Country will hold her quite subservient to them. And then, Rory, I don’t like that Anne, so elegant a woman as she was, should turn queer and blunt, and she the very best, and wisest, and tenderest woman in the world.’ And small as the matter was, and old married woman as

Mary Aldour was, with a multitude of thoughts and cares, a little impatient and indignant moisture twinkled in the clear, bright blue eyes.

'My dear Mary, such trifles are neither here nor there. What need man or woman ask more in the name of moral worth and dignity than facing odds for the sake of duty ?'

Mary returned the confidence, and sympathy, and 'high thinking' of Finralia's eyes, and said simply, 'I am in the wrong, Rory ; you remember I always said you were better in the main than I,' and with the old frankness and eagerness.

The lines were not written—the heroic lines—

'Can a man die better
Than facing fearful odds
For the ashes of his fathers
And the temples of his gods ?'

but they may have been felt even by a Highland laird, battered and bruised spiritually in his day, as gallant, gruff Horatius bodily in the eyes of the Tarquins, and Lars Porsenna, and his own folk of Rome. In the name of all that is true and heavenly, in plain prose, what can man or woman do better than face, not shirk, his or her odds, profound or petty, magnificent or mean, and live as well as die for a great presence and a great reward, for a cloud of witnesses and a sanctuary in the sky ?

'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.'

THE END.

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